The Dissertation Committee for Carol Werthmann Bedard certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TALK IN PEER-RESPONSE GROUPS AND STUDENTS' WRITING IN FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOMS

Committee:

_____
Colleen Fairbanks, Supervisor

_____
Randy Bomer

_____
Beth Maloch

_____
Diane Schallert

_____
Jo Worthy

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TALK IN PEER-RESPONSE GROUPS AND STUDENTS' WRITING IN FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOMS

by

Carol Werthmann Bedard, B.A.; M.ED.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December, 2004

Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Henry and Delia Werthmann. My mother's respect for education inspired my commitment to be a life-long pursuer of knowledge. My father's genuine respect for people instilled in me the importance of people's stories. Together they guided me to the understanding that life is about possibilities.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband and sons. My husband's willingness to commute and to always be available for our sons afforded me the opportunity to pursue a dream. Charles and Zachary were my student role-models, and Russell my confidant, my weekly dinner partner, my voice of reason, my cheerleader, my debate partner, and my password.

And finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my sisters, Eileen, Doris, and Arlette, and two aunts, Irene and Yolie. Their moral support pulled me through the tough moments, and Aunt Irene's prayers and words of wisdom brought a sense of perspective to the task.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the support, assistance, and encouragement of the following people.

Dr. Colleen Fairbanks,
I want to thank-you for your guidance, expertise, laughter, and friendship. My involvement with the Heart of Texas Writing Project inspired me to write, to research, to read, and most importantly, to remove my mask.

To my students,

I want to thank-you for showing me the gem of student empowerment.

Dr. Jo Worthy,
You came into my classroom, my research haven, and opened my eyes to endless research possibilities. My hat is off to you.

Dr. Beth Maloch,
You introduced me to many of the important names and ideas that formed the foundation of my dissertation. And most importantly, my students are readers because you taught me the importance of individual assessment and remediation.

Dr. Randy Bomer
You transformed me from a classroom teacher to an educator. You introduced me to the politics of education and modeled for me the importance of assuming leadership roles in professional organizations. Your description of a "scholarly life" profoundly influenced my lifestyle.

Dr. Diane Schallert
Because you taught me the importance of building a repertoire of names and research studies that I can cite without hesitation, I can now enter into professional discussions with confidence.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the faculty, parents, students, and staff at Lake Elementary for your continued support and encouragement.

Ms. Olivia Becerra,
You saved my life on more than one occasion.

Dr. Candice McQueen,
When I thought I couldn't take another step, you were there with the best advice, expect the worst.

Mr. Charles Fuhrken,
You were the first person to say to me, "You are a writer!"

Norma Carr,
You are Scarlett O'Hara, my heroine.

Jane Anne Jenkins and Katie Guevara,
Once an Indian, Always an Indian.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TALK IN PEER-RESPONSE GROUPS AND STUDENTS' WRITING IN FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOMS

Publication No. _____

Carol Werthmann Bedard, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Colleen Fairbanks

This study reports a teacher research investigation documenting the relationship between classroom talk during peer-response writing groups and fifth-grade students' writing in a writing workshop. Prior to the beginning of the study, the students participated in a series of talk lessons that taught them how to work collaboratively and how to talk in an exploratory manner. Data gathering included field notes, video tapes of mini-lessons, transcripts of recorded peer conferences, two sets of written work (a narrative set and an informative set), two student surveys, and interview data. Analysis of peer conference transcripts, written work, field notes, and student surveys indicated that reader-based feedback encouraged revision (51% of suggestions were acted upon), and suggestions corresponded closely to the instructional context of the writing workshop. Criterion-based feedback provided opportunities for students to explain and defend their writing. Analysis of peer conference transcripts and student interviews suggested that talk in peer-response writing groups supported learning by group members sharing ideas and new perspectives, explaining and justifying their opinions, and defining

vocabulary words for each other. Moreover, the talk in the groups promoted student engagement with their topics. Data from student interviews indicated that talk in peer-response writing groups supports the collaborative learning model. Each group acquired its own identity, encouraged group norms for interaction and behavior, and developed a sense of camaraderie. Teaching students how to work collaboratively and how to talk in an exploratory manner (through Talk Lessons) helped mitigate against unequal power distributions in these groups. The collaborative learning in the peer-response writing groups encouraged agency in two ways: student voices were heard and through talk students developed a concept of self as they explained their thinking, and consequently, brought into focus their values, rights, and obligations.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

OTHER

Other
The last line under the category
Racial/ethnic background
On
Job applications
College applications and
IRS forms

The people above are
American Indians
Asian Americans
African Americans
Hispanic Americans and
White Americans
But the last line is just

O
T
H
E
R

Other feels
Like a hot muggy day
In El Paso, Texas
With two best friends
Jane Anne
A tall thin blue-eyed
Blond- haired beauty and
Katie
A tall thin brown- eyed
Black- haired model

Stepping off the bus
On the first day of high-school
Shouting promises of
I will see you at lunch

Hurrying to the cafeteria to

W A I T
In
l-i-n-e

Emerging with a
Piping hot plate of junk food
Surveying the immense cafeteria
And

F
R
E
E
Z
I
N
G

Jane Anne Jenkins sitting at the “White” table
Katie Guevara sitting at the “Mexican” table
Where does
An English speaking girl with
A German father
A Mexican mother
and
Beautiful olive skin
sit?

Other didn’t have a table
That day

Or

E
V
E
R

OR

U
N
T
I
L

I began my journey through a doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin

Statement of the Problem

The poem, *Other*, celebrates my successful journey through graduate school and also represents the origin of the problem for this dissertation, finding opportunities for student voices to be heard. The poem was my first attempt to "un-silence" my voice, to remove my mask, to express feelings associated with being different, being racially mixed. When I arrived at the University of Texas at Austin campus on a cold, brisk January day to begin my doctoral program voyage, I carried with me a suitcase filled with life experiences that remained locked deep inside of me. My voice had been silenced. But in my very first graduate class, Literacy and Culture, I was exposed to works that addressed the complexities of racial issues. In his book, *Close to Home: Oral and Literate Practices in a Transnational Mexicano Community*, Guerra (1998) wrote, "In an attempt to come to terms with the circumstances that marginalize people, *Close to Home* addresses questions about who is expected or has a right to speak or write in a range of rhetorically and ideologically charged genres." As I read Guerra's book over and over again I was drawn to words and phrases like *marginalize, right to speak, constraints*, and *voice*. As I progressed through coursework and read works by Mercer, Foley, Cazden,

Elbow, hooks, Vygotsky, Gee, Freire, Spear, Lensmire, and Ladson-Billings, the idea of acknowledging and respecting the life experiences that students bring to the classroom kept reoccurring. Dr. Scheurich, in Introduction to Systems of Human Inquiry, introduced the philosophy of constructivism. The tenets of modern social constructivism--- learning is dependent on the prior conceptions the learner brings to the experience, the learner must construct his or her own meaning, learning is contextual, and learning is dependent on the shared understandings learners negotiate with others---provided a different view of learning and a different way for me to look at my own life experiences. Participating in discussions on ethnographic studies (*Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep In The Heart of Tejas* and *The Heartland Chronicles*) written by Dr. Douglas E. Foley and multi-cultural literature introduced in the classes, Children's Literature and Literature for Young Adults, I began to value the life-experiences I had and to acknowledge the frustrations I experienced because of my mixed heritage. Very importantly, I recognized that I was not alone. During class discussions many of my peers also had rich stories to tell; my feelings were not unique. In my own classroom, as my reflective skills sharpened, I saw in the eyes of my students stories they yearned to write and voices that yearned to sing. Writing the poem, *Other*, made an indelible impression on me; it illuminated the importance of providing students with opportunities to talk and write about their life experiences, and ultimately it led to my research topic, discourse during the writing process.

General Background

Fortunately, at about this same time I was invited to participate in the Heart of Texas Writing Project summer institute. For four glorious weeks I had the privilege of

mingling with a group of professionals. I had the opportunity to read and discuss research, to write and have my work critiqued, and to develop a teacher demonstration. It was not surprising that my chosen topic for the demonstration was voice. The demonstration addressed Lensmire's (2000) two depictions of voice, voice as individual expression in writing and voice as participation or agency. Encouraged by my colleagues' support and expertise, the ideas that were spinning in my head (the importance of students having the opportunity to share their views and life experiences, the importance of writing as a form of communication and self-discovery, and the importance of research) jelled. I spent the summer mulling over the conceptions of voice in Lensmire's (2000) book, *Powerful Writing, Responsible Teaching* and reading about teacher research in Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle's (1993) book, *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* and MacLean and Mohr's (1999) book, *Teacher-Researchers at Work.* In the fall, Dr. Beth Maloch guided me to the work of Barnes (1976), Cazden (2001), and Mercer (1995, 2000). All three researchers believe the task for both teachers and researchers is to make the usually transparent medium of classroom discourse the object of attention. Cazden (2001) studied the patterns of communication between teachers and students found in classrooms. She focused on three questions: how the patterns of language use affect what counts as knowledge and what occurs as learning; how these patterns affect the quality or inequality of students' educational opportunities, and what communicative competence these patterns presume and/or foster. One finding from Cazden's research and her review of others' research was that the IRE (teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation) or teacher feedback (IRF) was the most common classroom discourse pattern at all grade levels. This pattern, according to

Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995), gives a teacher power in the classroom through a form of monologism that "attempts to stifle dialogue and interaction and the potential for taking up a critical stance" (p. 446). This research was significant because it highlighted the need to investigate alternative patterns of classroom communication. It cast a shadow on the "sage on the stage" teaching style and underscored the need for more interactive communication patterns.

Similarly, Barnes (1976) found that the expectations set up in a classroom also can constrain the students' participation in the shaping of learning. Specifically, Barnes conducted a survey of secondary teachers' attitudes to written work and found that "the way in which teachers think about what constitutes knowledge is often linked to what they think learning and teaching are. That is, a view of knowledge is likely to carry with it a view of classroom communication of the roles of teacher and pupil in formulating knowledge" (p. 139). Barnes was one of the first educators to recognize the importance of the knowledge that students bring to the classroom. If a teacher views knowledge as a set of facts that must be transmitted to students, then the knowledge students bring into the classroom is not valued. On the other hand, if a teacher views learning as an interaction between his meaning and those of his students, knowledge is constructed and learning is a kind of relationship between what the student brought to the classroom and what the teacher presented.

Wells (2000) connected the importance of context or environment to Vygotsky's theories. According to Wells (2000), Vygotksy was concerned with the "scope and rapidity of human development: How do humans, in their short life trajectories, advance so far beyond their initial biological endowment and in such diverse directions?" (p. 53).

To answer this question, Vygotsky saw it necessary to look not only at individuals but also at the social and material environment with which they interacted in the course of their development. From this perspective, who a person becomes is dependent on the communication systems he participates in and on the support and assistance he receives from other members of the community in appropriating the specific values, knowledge, and skills that are enacted in participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Applying Vygotsky's theory to education, Wells (2000) contends that Vygotskian theory calls for an approach to learning and teaching that is both collaborative and exploratory. In a collaborative classroom the students are viewed not simply as a collection of individuals but also as a community that works toward shared goals. Students contribute to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Mercer (1995) also recognized the importance of student participation and added to Barnes' (1976) notion of exploratory talk (talk in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas) in an attempt to make student contributions more productive. Mercer's research on talk is important for two reasons. One, it draws attention to the fact that there are several types or descriptions of talk, with each serving a distinct purpose. Mercer distinguishes between three types, exploratory, cumulative (talk in which speakers build positively but uncritically on what the other has said), and disputational (talk which is characterized by disagreement and individualized decision-making). Secondly, and very importantly for this study because it focuses on collaborative learning, Mercer relates the concepts of disputational talk, cumulative talk, and exploratory talk into models of distinctive social modes of thinking. The models help explain how "talk is used by people to 'think together'" (Mercer, 1995, p. 104).

Purpose of the Study

Drawing on the research of Cazden (2001), Barnes (1975), and Mercer (1995), and on Vygotsky's theory (as cited in Wells, 2000) that calls for an approach to learning and teaching that is both collaborative and exploratory, I decided that peer-response writing groups would be an ideal activity system to provide opportunities for students to share their views, their life experiences, and their knowledge while at the same time receiving support and assistance from peers while attempting to communicate in written form. Writing groups were ideal because by their very nature they are collaborative; they minimize the amount of time a teacher can engage in the IRE (teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation) pattern, they recognize the importance of student knowledge, and they provide opportunities for exploratory talk. Additionally, although there has been research on peer groups working collaboratively to solve problems (Barnes, 1975), the research on writing groups whose members had been exposed to talking in an exploratory manner was limited. Therefore, the decision was made. While working in writing groups, the influence of the talk on writing would be examined.

Pilot Study

Armed with theories about communication patterns, with knowledge about the tenets of constructivism, and with the tools to conduct teacher research, I set out to conduct my first study. Wanting to tap into the advantages of joint activities, I videotaped four students during literature groups, writer's workshop, and social studies activities. Field notes consisted of notes taken during collaborative group work and personal reflections about the activities. One interview was conducted with the four students who were video-taped. Three themes emerged during the course of the study:

- Exploratory talk (Mercer, 1995) helps students form thoughts and clarify their thinking
- An open and hypothetical style of learning encourages exploratory talk and inquiry based learning
- In order to insure equity and opportunity for all in the classroom, students should participate in a variety of collaborative activities

Four findings were drawn:

- Exploratory talk occurred most often in learning activities that required students to collaborate to solve a problem or produce one collective product
- Students engaged infrequently in exploratory talk during writing time. The talk during writing time mainly consisted of giving suggestions without explanations
- There was an unequal distribution of talk during discussions. Students were aware of the situation and tried to rectify it but did not see the uneven distribution as a problem because all students played an important, albeit different, role.
- The level of verbal participation for students varied depending on the type of activity.

Certain students were almost silenced during problem-solving activities but contributed greatly during writing groups or activities in which students worked in pairs. And so after reflecting on the findings, I realized that students had to be taught how to participate in various types of activities. The findings of this study were similar to the problems that Spear (1988) investigated:

> Students are no more expert at contributing productively to groups than they are at writing. And teachers can no more expect them to write well without instruction than

> to discuss writing effectively without help. In fact, given the rhetorical similarities of writing and discussing writing, many student shortcomings manifest in one medium are also reflected in the other—shortcomings in discovering ideas, developing and elaborating thoughts, reading, reviewing and responding critically, perceiving connections, exploring alternative organization. (p. 7-8)

Thus, Spear concluded that students must learn the interpersonal skills that make fruitful discussion of writing possible. Barnes and Todd (1977) suggested that classroom discussion has to meet certain requirements for explicitness that would not normally be required in everyday discourse, and Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif (2000) made the point that teachers must model how to interact effectively and be aware of social relationships that affect collaborative work. Effective response groups result from knowledge and practice, not just luck. Therefore, before beginning my study on the influence of classroom talk on writing, I conducted a pilot study in which the students participated in talk lessons taken from the book, *Thinking Together: A Programme of Activities for Developing Thinking Skills at KS2,* by Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif (2000). The lessons were designed to develop students' use of language for thinking constructively and critically.

For the pilot study, the students were organized into groups of four. The grouping was based on Lensmire's description of "friendship" groups. Each student chose one "friend," and then when possible a female and a male pair were joined together to form a group of four students. The students participated in eight talk lessons (See Appendix A for a complete listing of talk lessons.) The first lessons concentrated on making the students aware of talk in the classroom and establishing group rules. The second section

of lessons concentrated on having the students practice the group rules in very structured situations. For example, in one activity, the students practiced the rule that all group members must contribute. A chart was marked off as each student took turns contributing to the conversation. For the last set of talk lessons the students practiced using the ground rules and using exploratory talk while solving moral questions, such as "Should you report your best friend to the authorities for shoplifting if he stole the item to give to his terminally ill mother?" The students looked forward to participating in the talk lessons and in a student survey reported the benefits of the lessons. The following reasons were the most common responses to the question, "What did you learn by participating in the talk lessons?

- Talk lessons teach students how to work in a group.

  Susan responded, "I learned how to be included in a group. Do not let them [group members] do all the work. I also learned to let people speak their ideas." Roxanne added, "Explain why you want to do an activity; don't just pick yourself."

- Talk lessons teach you to give reasons

  Michael wrote, "The main thing I learned from the talk lessons is to give reasons why your thought is correct and to help people to understand why their thought is wrong." Kyle added, "I have learned to discuss things and sort things better according to everyone's ideas and arguments."

- Talk lessons teach you to stay on task.

  Doris wrote, "The most important thing I learned from the talk lessons is how not to start arguing over some little thing."

- Talk lessons expose students to differences

  Ellen wrote, “I’ve learned that working together is very important. The talk lessons helped me get the feeling of what it feels like to work with people who might not have the same ideas as me.”

- Talk lessons are fun.

  Brad wrote, “I like working with some of my friends,” and Jill wrote, “I like working with my group because everyone shares and listens.”

There were also six main ideas that I learned from the experience. The ideas were teacher research changes the student/teacher relationship, teacher research broadens a teacher’s perspective, talk lessons transform groups of students into collaborative groups, grouping makes a difference, students recognize the benefits of developing a long-term working relationship with a group of students, and dialogue plays a central role in learning.

- Teacher research changes the student/teacher relationship. According to MacLean and Mohr (1999), “Students come to see themselves as important to the teacher’s teaching and research; sometimes becoming co-researchers” (p. 110). I knew this to be true the day one group experienced technical difficulties. The group decided, on their own, to redo the session during their recess time. The group took their job to record their collaborative activities seriously.

- Teacher research promotes a broader view of teaching. My approach to teaching changed after I began conducting teacher research. My focus went from designing activities to examining how knowledge was being acquired.

Mirroring the writing workshop philosophy, my focus was on learning processes and not final products.

- The talk lessons transformed the groups of students into collaborative groups. Kyle expressed this idea, "At the beginning of the year one person would say something and the rest of the people hid their ideas so we wrote whatever came first. Everybody also just said something, but it was never discussed or disagreed with. Now we give reasons for what we say and discuss everything and share all ideas."
- Grouping makes a difference. Groups whose members had similar reading, writing, and verbal abilities worked the best. The groups that experienced the most trouble were same-gender groups. Liz expressed this frustration when she wrote, "I have learned that working with an entire group of girls isn't as easy as I thought it would be." Groups whose members' writing, reading, and verbal abilities drastically differed had group members who felt they did not receive enough benefit from the group to make it worthwhile. Colleen expressed this opinion, "My writing group hasn't influenced my writing because they can never think of something to say about my writing."
- The majority of students (twenty-one of twenty-three students who responded to the question) reported that they wanted to remain in the same writing group all year. The reasons they gave were: the group had worked hard to become cohesive; group members were familiar with each group member's writing and knew what mistakes to look for, and each group had their own way of

working. The opposing thoughts were: You would be exposed to different ideas and therefore, learn more from different group members.

- Dialogue plays a central role in learning. A successful class discussion "builds an intricate network of understandings as each contribution sequentially transforms and expands given information into new understandings" (Nystrand, 1997, p. 90). After the talk lessons, Jack commented, "I've learned how to deal with situations such as when a friend steals something, and you can't decide to tell or not." "The process of negotiating new understandings involves orienting individuals in fundamental epistemological ways, not just denoting and reciting concepts" (Becker, 1922, p. 119).

The ideas I learned from the pilot study and the ideas of the students served as the blueprint for the study. Because I learned the students took seriously their role in the research, I included student surveys and student interviews in the design of the dissertation study. I also kept the same grouping of students throughout the study (the majority of students wanted to remain with the same group) and built in three opportunities for dialogue, brainstorm conferences, first-draft conferences, and rubric conferences.

The talk lessons taught the students how to work together and provided them the opportunity to practice using exploratory talk to problem solve. Thus, the group learning model was established, and according to Dewey (1963), group learning can provide the formation of purposes which direct the student's activities in the learning process. Therefore, with the same groups in place, the scene was set to investigate two questions:

- How can talk in peer group writing conferences be characterized?

- Will talk about writing in peer group conferences influence the outcome of the written final draft? In other words, in what ways will suggestions given in the writing conferences be taken into account and acted upon?

Significance of the Study

According to Bruffee (1985),

> Students can only write about what they can converse about and, perhaps, have conversed about. Furthermore, students can write effectively only to people with whom they have been and continue to be in conversation. Finally, students' writing will only be as good as their conversation, especially their conversation about writing (p. 3).

Bruffee, along with other authorities in the discipline of writing—Murray (1996), Calkins (1991), Lensmire (2000), and Dyson (2003) have written about the importance of groups' many intimate ties with writing and learning processes. According to Wells (2000),

> The last twenty-five years have seen a number of changes of great significance about learning and teaching. Thanks, in large measure, to the work of Jack Moffett in the United States and of Jack Britton and the Royal Commission in England and Wales, there is now a greater recognition of the central role of language in education, not only as a subject in the curriculum, but also as the medium in which the learning and teaching of all subjects is actually carried out. (p. 51).

This being the case, the findings of this study are significant for several reasons. First, they add to the body of knowledge about the influence of talk on writing. Specifically, the findings added detailed information about how students talk, how they

give suggestions, what type of suggestions they give, how the suggestions were influenced by instructional content, and how genre influenced the type and willingness to accept suggestions. Next, the findings also lend support to the importance of teaching students how to work in collaborative groups and how to talk in an exploratory manner and give very specific, detailed suggestions. Then, even more importantly, the findings illustrate the importance of student agency. The opportunity to share their knowledge instilled in the students a sense of empowerment. Consequently, they viewed themselves as capable individuals. Alice commented, "Like in our writing group we can talk and like work it out and find ways to make our writing better." The students were not waiting to be told how to solve a problem, they were engaging in talk to find a solution; they were learning. According to Greene, (1988), thought grows through language and language reflects the range and depth of our experiences. As Bruffee (1983) explains it, "students sharing each other's writing learn to ask where their peers are coming from as the author of a given essay and where they hope to go with their piece" (p. 28). Working collaboratively, students must define problems for themselves and explore solutions. While working through the solution, students practice listening to others, talking, and often reading. They also learn to generate ideas, accept new ideas, combine ideas, debate ideas, and above all assess their own ideas. In summary, group learning in the writing process allows students direct access to the processes of inquiry and discovery. Through listening to Dr. Foley detailing his experiences of living in a small south Texas town during the time the Chicano civil rights movement emerged and challenged the segregated racial order, debating issues like the "English-Only" movement in Instructional Theory, reading articles such as *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A*

Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work In Women's Studies" (McIntosh, 1988), writing about the socio-cultural model of literacy, and discussing the tenets of modern social constructivism, I discovered a new way of thinking about what counts as knowledge, what counts in life. I discovered the importance of talk and the feeling of freedom one experiences from writing about one's life experiences. My discoveries led me to inquire, to research how talk in writing groups influences writing.

Finally, this study is significant because only a few studies such as Gorman (1974) and Sharan (1976) have taken into account the need to "teach students how to talk in groups." Even fewer studies such as Bouton and Rice (1983) and Spear (1988) have taken into account the need to teach students how to talk in groups and then documented the relationship between talk and writing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I will review five areas of research that relate to the study of how talk about writing influences the revision stage of writing. The five areas are teacher research, the writing process, genre development, classroom talk, and collaborative learning. Each area of research was chosen because it provided background information which was used to design and execute the study. For example, after reviewing Applebee's (1987) critical critique of teacher researchers, I established definite roles for myself as the teacher researcher; I would teach the writing workshop mini-lessons, administer the surveys, and conduct interviews, but I definitely would not be a part of the student conferences. As such, I was an observer with a bird's-eye view of the classroom. The collaborative learning and writing process reviews provided the rationale for the implemented assessment system. Specifically, the work of Slavin (1987) and Rief (1992) promoted the use of structures that rewarded group efforts more than individual ones. In my research proposal I had proposed to collect data on three sets of writing, a narrative set, a persuasive set, and an informative set. After further research on genre development, I allowed Donovan and Smolkin's (2002) finding, all texts, regardless of their function, fall within two basic types, narrative (a recounting of events) and nonnarrative (attending to a topic) to alter my design, and collected data on only two sets of written work, a narrative and a nonnarrative or informational piece. Finally, Mercer's work on types of talk influenced the study's focus on exploratory talk. In summary, the literature review provided the building blocks for the study.

Teacher Research

Teacher research is more than a method. It is a distinctive way of knowing about teaching and learning. Because teacher research interrupts traditional assumptions about knowers, knowing, and what can be known about teaching, it has the potential to redefine the notion of knowledge base for teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Because I conducted teacher research, in this section I will formally define the term by sharing a personal account of my own teacher research experience. This will be followed by a discussion of both teacher-research contributions and criticisms of teacher research.

A Working Description of Teacher Research

> "Now I need them [students] as much as they need me."
>
> (MacLean & Mohr, 1999, p. 21)

The three "Rs", reading, reflection, and re-seeing, characterize the life of a teacher researcher. After reading the work of Cazden (2001), Barnes (1976), and Mercer (1995), I began to reflect on the life of my own classroom. My reflection led me to the importance of communication systems in a classroom and set the course for my teacher research journey. This pattern, reading, reflection, re-seeing the events in one's own classroom, is characteristic of teacher researchers. According to Zeichner and Noffke (2001),

> Much of practitioner research involves the careful study of the participants in educational practice, very often involving the students or children---what and how they learn. The research is personal, because it represents not only the search for

general principles or theories of school curriculum or classroom instruction but also the search for understanding and improving one's everyday practice. (p.307)

Along the way I learned to "see" what was happening in the classroom by noting patterns of behavior, analyzing conversation, and recording the observations systematically. Merriam (1998) differentiates between routine observation—largely unconscious and unsystematic-- and research observation which is a tool when it "(1) serves a formulated research purpose, (2) is planned deliberately, (3) is recorded systematically, and (4) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability."

I became an avid reader of research. Teacher Research, according to Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2000), involves a recursive relationship between theory and practice; theory influences practice and practice influences theory. My reading initially influenced what I "saw" in the classroom and the questions I asked. Then, what I saw influenced what I read, and my questions evolved. Finally, my questions led to a study and the development of theories about learning and teaching.

I also learned how to operate tape recorders, camcorders, and transcribing machines. Fleischer (1995) claimed that the very existence of teacher research depends upon one's understanding not only of the particular issue one is researching but also of the complexities of the research process itself. Time management, materials management, and social-interactions management are just a few of the complexities of the research process.

I became an advocate for children's voices to be heard. I learned to listen to students and to take into account their opinions on how they learn best. For example, a "silent writing period" was incorporated each day because students reported in a student

survey that they could think more creatively when the room was quiet. The importance of student empowerment is often a characteristic of teacher research. According to Gaventa and Horton (1981), participants' knowledge is valued and developed. The research, therefore, is "from" and "with" rather than "on" and has full participation by those affected by the research process.

Finally, teacher research expanded my professional opportunities. I have presented my research at staff development workshops, at parent meetings, and at state conventions. I have also published in educational journals. According to MacLean and Mohl (1999), "Teacher research is professional development that respects the knowledge and experience of the teachers involved. It is also a form of curriculum development, school planning and program evaluation, teacher preparation, and school reform" (p. xi).

Thus, teacher research is about learning, learning from reading, learning from peers, learning from students. It is about formulating questions, reading, collecting data, analyzing data, and forming conclusions. It is about sharing knowledge with peers, parents, and professionals. It is about building educational relationships with students. And most importantly, it is about reflection, not only about one's practice, but about how one's beliefs guide one's teaching.

Teacher Research Contributions

Knowledge generation is one of the most important contributions of teacher research. In the literature there is much written about teacher researchers generating knowledge for their own practice, for the immediate community of teachers, and for the larger community of educators.

Knowledge for their own practice

One type of knowledge generated from teacher research is knowledge about one's own practice. For example, Fecho (as cited in Cochran-Smith, 1993) began an empirical study of teacher-student writing conferences after viewing videotapes made in his classroom and was dissatisfied with what he saw. During the study, his students' inquiries brought unexpected insights, and both he and his students came to view knowledge differently. "They came to a similar realization that while others can support, inform, challenge, and provide a context for learning, only learners…themselves can come to know or assume responsibility for making meaning of their work in the classroom"(p. 46). O'Dell (1987) argues that teachers' research questions emerge from a sense of dissonance: "Something isn't quite clear to us; something just doesn't add up" (p. 129). Problems become questions to investigate, and findings guide practice.

Case studies are another type of knowledge that teacher researchers generate. Because of a teacher's position, a teacher has the ability to study a student over a long period of time in various social and educational activities. Often, the teacher has also developed a body of knowledge about the community. Thus, a teacher has the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a student and an understanding of the student's beliefs, learning style, interaction patterns, and motivations. This type of case study, especially when a group of case studies are conducted, gives educators an insiders or *emic* view into the classroom, something that could not be accomplished by a researcher who simply comes to visit for a few hours at a time or a few weeks at a time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993)

MacLean and Mohr (1999) described a third type of knowledge that teacher research generates, knowledge about the intersection of certain teaching methods and student achievement. For example, one teacher looked at the correlation between her vocabulary program and student achievement. Other teachers have looked at the effects of literacy practices for various racial, economic, and gender groups. This context-specific information has become even more important as the American classroom has become more diverse (Lytle, 2000).

Knowledge for the immediate community of teachers

Teachers working together within a single institution as well as groups of teachers coming together from several institutions to form a community use inquiry as a way to build curriculum. A group of faculty at Michigan State University reconstructed their teacher education curriculum by drawing on data collected by professors teaching different sections of an introductory course on teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Featherston as cited in Cochran-Smith, 1993).

Knowledge for the larger community of educators

Finally, because teacher research emerges from praxis and because it preserves teachers' own words and analyses, it has the potential to be a particularly robust method for understanding whether and how preservice and inservice teachers construct knowledge and theories of practice, how the theories may change over time, and what impact the theories may have on teaching and learning (Hubbard & Power, 1993). Thus, Calkins (1985) asserts that teacher research has the potential to construct, modify and evaluate theory that will inform teaching pedagogy.

Other Benefits of Teacher Research

Knowledge generation is not the only contribution that teacher research has made. One of the benefits of teacher research is that it adds another dimension to the student/teacher relationship. Teachers and students are dependent on each other; students depend on the teacher for instruction, and teachers depend on students for information. Both teachers and students come to view themselves as contributors of knowledge, and this view creates a heightened sense of respect for each other (Fleischer, 1995; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). Also, when teachers interview or ask students questions such as, "What activity helped you most in your preparation for your Hamlet presentation?" students are invited to think about their learning; this reflection adds another dimension of learning, metacognition, for students. Students begin to analyze not just their finished products but also the processes they used to accomplish the task.

Another benefit to teacher research is that it creates opportunities for professional development. Beginning around the 1970s, organizations such as the National Writing Project began to emerge. These organizations encouraged teachers to come together to read research critically, to provide an audience for each other's writing, and to develop teacher demonstrations/presentations. My own teacher demonstration on voice generated my interest in student voices being heard, and eventually led me to investigate writing groups, an educational setting that capitalizes on student voices. The presentations and journal articles that have been generated as a result of this collaboration have provided valuable information for other teachers and the field of education (Goswami & Stillman, 1987). Also, by looking at what teachers themselves are researching, the academic

community can get a sense of what the teachers are viewing as important (Hubbard & Power, 1993).

Finally, Kincheloe (2003) asserts that teacher research has empowered teachers to question the status quo and the top-down enforcement of policies that do not take into account the abilities or learning styles of individual students. But although teacher research has made many contributions to the field of education, it is not without its critics.

Criticisms of Teacher Research

Although Cochran-Smith (1984) was writing about teacher research in the 80s, it was not until 2001, in the fourth edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, that a chapter on practitioner research was included. Previously, practitioner research or teacher research was viewed as professional development for practitioners but not addressed as research having implications for understanding different ways of knowing (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). The criticisms of teacher research have come from researchers such as Huberman (1996) and Campbell (1963) and generally fall into one of two categories, institutional concerns such as teacher research adds to a teacher's workload, often without the benefits of administrative support or financial support (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), and standards for methodological rigor (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). For this study, it is the questioning of teacher research standards for methodological rigor that is of concern.

When questioning the methodological rigor of teacher research, critics have focused

on the role of the researcher, the origin of research questions, the generalizability of the research, and documentation and analysis (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Arthur Applebee, a university researcher who writes the "Musings" column for the journal, *Research in the Teaching of English*, sets up a dichotomy between teachers and researchers. Applebee (1987) implies that "real researchers" are objective observers, personally removed, and bring a rigor to their work that teacher researchers lack. He views teachers as imperfect researchers because they are part of the context and interact with their informants.

Critics assert that research questions from university- based researchers reflect extensive study of the existing theoretical and empirical literature whereas teacher researchers' questions are only grounded in the life of the classroom. For example, teacher research has been done on response journals to inspect the positive influences of journals on literacy processes (Handloff and Golden, 1995). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) counter this criticism of teacher research by asserting that "the unique feature of the questions that prompt teacher research is that they emanate from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersection of the two" (p. 15).

Teacher research has also been criticized because of its lack of generalizability. Zumwalt (1982) counters this criticism with the idea that attempts to formulate general laws are probably not the most useful for understanding educational phenomena because laws are by definition context free. What is needed in education is insight into the particulars of how and why something works and for whom it works within the contexts of particular classrooms. Interpretive researchers add credence to this argument because

they believe that understanding one classroom helps educators to understand better other classrooms.

Another problem area is documentation and analysis. Although teachers collect the same type of data as university researchers (fieldnotes, videotapes, interviews, classroom documents), critics question if because of a teacher's time restraints, if a teacher's data can be sufficiently systematic and teacher researchers sufficiently well prepared. A teacher's rebuttal is that a teacher has an emic view whereas an outside researcher does not.

The Writing Process Model for Teaching Writing

Students actually bring to classrooms various forms of literacy from their histories and cultures. Indifference in the classroom to these various forms of literacy is one of the major obstacles in contemporary schools to a good education for many students (Myers, 1996). The writing process model, with its emphasis on process and not product, its emphasis on allowing all students to have voice, and its emphasis on collaboration, helps to overcome the indifference in the classroom to the various forms of literacy that students bring from home. In this section, I will provide an overview of the writing process model and then discuss the benefits and criticisms of the model.

Overview of the Writing Process Model

One of the central aims of education is teaching students to communicate with the written word. Before the fundamental shift in writing instruction occurred in the 1970s, writing instruction consisted of providing good models for students to imitate, providing

ample writing time, and correcting all errors. This kind of instruction is described as product oriented because it focuses on the form and correctness of the written product. By contrast, the stages of the writing process are "more in keeping with the true nature of the act of writing" (Cotton as cited in Boss, 2003, p. 4). In process-oriented instruction, the teacher teaches students strategies when they write. For example, a teacher will model brainstorming to show students ways to generate ideas for writing (Hayes & Flower, 1986).

Support for the writing process model has come from research in the cognitive processes that underlie writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981), from classroom-based research that focuses on the socially-oriented interest in writing (Dyson, 1989, 1993), and from classroom studies that emphasize meaning and purposeful communication (Smith, 1982; Murray, 1982).

The principles of process writing include the notion of writing as a process of discovery; the importance of students' engaging in planning, pre-writing, and revision to improve their texts; the production and work on multiple drafts; and the use of writing conferences (Haneda & Wells, 2000). Research has also identified a number of critical features of the writing process (Hayes & Flower, 1986). Writing is goal directed; writing goals are hierarchically organized, and writers accomplish their goals by employing three major processes—planning, sentence generation, and revision.

Writers usually comment on their major goals (the purpose of the writing and the intended audience) early in the writing process. After writers have identified their major goals, they frequently proceed to identify sub-goals designed to help them accomplish the major goals. Sub-goals are accomplished through planning, sentence generation, and

revising. In planning, the writer generates ideas through brainstorming and organizes them into a plan. Planning in writing typically involves activating prior knowledge and shaping that knowledge to fit the situation and audience. In sentence generation the writer produces formal sentences intended to create a draft. In a study of sentence generation, Kaufer, Hayes, and Flower (1986) found evidence that the work involved in translating plans into text is substantial. They compared the lengths of writers' outlines with the lengths of their essays and found that even for the most extensive outliners, the ideas noted in the outline were expanded on the average by a factor of eight in the final essay. In revising, the writer evaluates the draft and attempts to improve it, but according to Bracewell, Scardamalia, and Bereiter (1978), many writers lack the skill to make effective use of revision in their own writing. Bracewell, Scardamalia, and Bereiter (1978) found that fourth graders hardly revise at all, that eight-graders' revisions hurt more than they help, and that for twelfth-graders helpful revisions narrowly outnumber harmful ones. Dahl's (1988) study of fourth-grade peer conferences disputes one finding of the Bracewell, Scardamalia, and Bereiter (1978) study. Dahl (1988) found that "conferencing peers talked about revision and many actual changes resulted from these suggestions" (p. 173). Bartlett (1981) examined the revision processes of fifth-grade students who were revising both their own and other writers' texts. (Bartlett's study used the term revision to describe grammatical mistakes. In my study, grammar, spelling, and punctuation are considered editing. Changes to content and form are considered revision, but often the students corrected punctuation, grammar and spelling mistakes during revision conferences. Therefore, I included this study in the literature review.) Bartlett (1981) found that when the students were revising their own texts, they were able to find

56% of missing subjects or predicates but only ten percent of faulty referring expressions. In contrast, when the students were revising the texts of other students, they detected 50 occurrences of each type of problem. Thus, the research on the ability of students to revise their work has had mixed results.

In conclusion, research is beginning to reveal the outlines of a theory of writing. It is providing writing instructors with a much deeper understanding of the nature of writing processes and of how the writer uses them to produce text. The key to good process instruction is that it must be built on a sound understanding of the writing process and good diagnoses of developing writers' problems and needs (Greenberg, 1987).

Benefits of the Writing Process Model in Teaching Writing

There are three main benefits to teaching a process and not a product. First, the process approach allows for one's voice to be heard. Second, writers control and can implement the components of the writing process in a manner that suits them best, and third, the process aligns well with many of the ideals of culturally relevant teaching as defined by Ladson-Billings (1994).

Many teachers were drawn into the writing process movement by the fundamental respect and attention it paid to children (Portalupi, 1999). The writing process offered teachers the chance to listen to students, to observe students, and to change from an authoritarian role to the role of guide. This role led to the building of communities as both teacher and students struggled to write together. According to Calkins (1991), the success of the writing workshop depends on building a classroom community in which students feel safe and respected. For Jay Robinson (in Fleischer & Schaafsma, 1998)

community consists of human beings with lived lives who converse together, learn together, and create understanding together. In this type of classroom community, students can move their private ideas and thoughts to a public arena; a student's past and the present can co-mingle. New ideas can be learned and appropriated. In such a classroom students are open to the ideas and differences of others. Students listen and respond to others so their voices are not just heard but are strengthened.

Voice as individual expression is emphasized by writing workshop advocates (Lensmire, 2000). Workshop advocates' emphasis is on students' desire to express unique selves in writing. The self is seen as a stable, pre-existent self that can be expressed in writing. The goal is writing within a text and the commitment to voice is concerned primarily with liberty, especially of thought and expression.

By contrast, critical pedagogy advocates emphasize critical dialogues among teachers and students with student voices being heard. The self is seen as a social entity, created out of the experiences, histories, languages, and stories one has experienced. Voice is less a goal and more a necessary precondition for collective work to be done. Commitment to voice is linked with popular sovereignty and making people in power accountable to those affected by its exercise (Lensmire, 2000).

Although the two perspectives have different goals, the writing workshop process can meet both goals. In the writing workshop, what a student brings into the classroom is valued and respected. The composing of texts is a distinctly sociocultural process that involves making decisions, conscious or otherwise, about how one figures into the social world at any one point in time (Dyson, 1993). The writing workshop brings students together and provides a site for students to share their "specialness" and their connections

to others. In *The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write*, Dyson (2003) highlights how students include pop culture that they bring from home into their writing. Superheroes, Sesame Street characters, and from middle age learners, Harry Potter and his cohorts are sprinkled throughout students' writing. Thus, the students' experiences (their voices) are the springboard to other learning.

Another way students' voices are encouraged in the writing process is through peer conferences. In peer conferences, students have the freedom to talk about the issues that matter to them; they can also clarify thoughts and ideas. Documenting peer conference activity among fourth grade learners in a writing workshop, Dahl (1988) found that students used the peer conferences to accomplish specific purposes of their own. Gere and Abbot (1985) found that the range of comments during peer conferences varied depending on the grade level of the students and the mode of discourse. In general, narrative texts provoked more attention to content than expository texts, and younger students gave more attention to content than older students, who tended to focus on context and form, especially for expository texts. According to Calkins (1979), real growth in writing takes place when students make their own decisions for revising. Thus, the writing workshop process allows for both students' personal identities to be explored and revealed and the opportunity for a student's ideas and opinions to be expressed.

The second benefit to the writing process model as a basis for teaching writing is that the writers are in control and can implement the components of the writing process in a manner that suits them best. In the writing workshop process, students are given choices. They can choose topics to write about. (In some instances, the choice of genre

is even given.) Students are encouraged to write about what matters to them and to consider seriously the audience for whom they are writing (Klintworth, 2001).

The third benefit of the writing process model is that it aligns well with many of the ideals of culturally relevant teaching as defined by Ladson-Billings (1994). One assumption is that students come to school with important knowledge; they are not empty vessels. Another assumption is that the curriculum is fluid; it is not set in stone. This assumption can be readily seen in teacher/student conferences. In a teacher-student conference, the teacher may allow the student to set the curriculum. It is very common for a teacher to ask the student to decide what aspect of his/her writing he/she wants addressed in the conference. Taking cues from the student, the teacher then (on the spot) decides what to teach. This entire process can only be successful if the teacher acknowledges that there is not a set curriculum. This type of teacher-learner interaction has been labeled student-centered learning (Freire, 1970). In conclusion, the benefits of the writing process model are: it is student-centered; student voices are respected and student choices are honored.

Concerns About the Writing Process Model

Although there are many benefits to teaching a process and not a product, there are four important issues that must be considered. First, according to Gorrell (1983) an abuse of the writing process model is thinking that there is ONE process. Writing is a complex activity. Many writers acknowledge that it is a recursive process (Emig, 1977), and yet many teachers teach the process as if it were linear: prewrite, write, and revise.

A second criticism emerged from the focus on the social purposes of writing (Haneda & Wells, 2000). Reacting to the cognitive emphasis in research on writing processes, researchers in North America began to emphasize the different genres of writing (Miller, 1984). This research led to the recognition that the different genres of writing required different social-rhetorical purposes that require different strategies to accomplish their goals. That being the case, critics believe that the writing process model focuses mainly on expressive writing based on personal experience and fails to develop strategies appropriate for other written genres. Specifically, critics believe that in order to master the written genres of schooling, students need direct instruction. Genre forms should be taught through the analytic study of models, the learning of genre elements, and the collaborative and then solo production of exemplars (Haneda & Wells, 2000). A similar concern surrounds the third criticism of the writing process model.

Lisa Delpit (1988) has written about the third criticism of the writing process model, that the needs of all children, specifically some children of color, are not met. Numerous White teachers, professors, and even state school personnel from around the country misinterpreted Delpit's position/ideas as a dichotomy between skills and process. Delpit actually contends that good teachers of all colors typically incorporate a range of pedagogical orientations. She emphasizes, though, the need for students of color to be taught the rules of the culture of power because "being told explicitly the rules of the culture of power makes acquiring power easier" (p. 568). Delpit also contends that those with power are frequently least aware of its existence. Peggy McIntosh, in her article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies" (1988) would agree. McIntosh

makes the point that although many students are taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, the same students are not taught that white privilege puts whites at an advantage. By not teaching explicitly the rules of the culture of power, children of color are at a disadvantage because ultimately in the "real" world individuals are often judged by the product they produce; in the final analysis, the process writers go through to get to the final product is usually not as important as the final product itself.

A fourth problem with the writing process model has specifically to do with writing groups. Lensmire (2000) used Dewey's (1916/1966) conception of communities to evaluate what he termed "friendship groups." According to Dewey a successful community is one in which the group members share aesthetic, material, and intellectual interests and the progress of one member has worth for the experience of other members. In addition, the group members interact intimately with other groups such as school, church, or business groups. Using this framework, Lensmire discusses the friendship groups that makeup the writing groups in the writing workshop. Ideally, the groups form themselves and thus, the group members meet Dewey's first criteria for a successful group. The problem comes in when the groups interact with other groups. Lensmire discovered in one third-grade class he observed that the friendship groups formed along class and gender lines and that the groups avoided contact with other groups. When the groups did interact, it was not always in positive ways. Many contacts reinforced the class and gender boundaries and the hierarchical status of some groups. Thus, the workshop created an uneven power structure in the classroom. After reflection, Lensmire concluded that "nothing" about student choice assures communication across friendship groups. Therefore, his solution was to make the groups work together but provide close

supervision. He cautioned his readers to remember that harm is accomplished not just through contact but through isolation as well.

Thus, the writing workshop model has four potential problems. First, although writing is a recursive process, many teachers still treat it as a linear process. Second, critics believe too much emphasis is placed on expressive writing and as such certain genres are overlooked. Third, teachers encourage students to be independent learners, thinking they are promoting liberatory education, but many parents of children of color want their children to acquire the rules of the culture of power; their priority is not for their children to become autonomous. And finally, the writing workshop has the potential to create situations in which groups are divided along class and gender lines causing certain groups to have more social clout than other groups.

Genre Development

As children learn to write, the "young authors juggle and struggle with three interdependent yet very different aspects of written language as a medium of communication" (Zecker, 1999, p. 1). The three aspects are: the visual or graphic aspects of writing (directionality, letter forms, common letter patterns in their language, and spacing between words), the symbolic nature of writing (sound/letter correspondence), and the specific characteristics of different written genres. Written language is used for different communicative purposes and different meanings are expressed by different genres. Knowledge of different genres constitutes knowledge about the psychosocial aspects of written language (Dyson, 1985).

Since Aristotle, genres have been conceived as classes of texts distinguished by certain exclusive characteristics. This formalist notion of genres separates content from form. The emphasis is on the textual product and away from textual processes and conditions of production. This classical conception of genres is organized around structuralist dichotomies such as reading/writing, text/context, individual/society and are conceived to be static and normalizing structures that constrain individuals and determine the outcomes of communicative events (Kamberelis, 1999). Critiques of this conception of genres have come from within sociocultural perspectives, from Marxist sociological perspectives (Lukas, 1975), and from deconstructionist perspectives (Derrida, 1980). The Marxist perspective criticizes the strong historical determinism that inhibits multiple kinds of discursive structures to be supported by similar sets of social conditions. The deconstructionists believe that any genre could emerge at any time in relation to any set of historical conditions.

> According to Kamberelis (1999), because of the work of Bakhtin (1986), a resurgent interest in genres has been marked by attempts to criticize traditional notions of genres as classes of texts and to rethink the construct of genre in relation to the situated social practices in which discourse and texts are generated, as well as in relation to the personal histories of speakers and writers and the material and discursive histories of collectives and disciplines. (p. 405)

But as Kamberelis has pointed out, although there has been a shift in the way genre is viewed, there have been few changes in the textual dimensions of genres. Bakhtin (1986) explains the discrepancy, “Genres are sclerotic deposits of previous textual practices that embody familiar and generally understood congealed old world view[s]” (p. 165) that

remember past experiences and structures. Because social institutions tend to be relatively stable, genres tend to be reproduced over time and to change only in small increments (Hanks, 1987). Therefore, currently scholars define the term genre as "the relation of the social purpose of a text to the text's structure (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p.2). Texts differ structurally because they accomplish different functions in different communicative events. This idea was reinforced by the results of a study conducted by Zecker (1999) in which young children's ability to vary the forms of emergent writing as they wrote different kinds of texts was examined.

In the study, Zecker (1999) observed a group of kindergartners and first graders as they wrote three different types of texts (a story, a letter to a friend, and a shopping list). It was discovered that various characteristics of a given genre influence the emergent writing systems used by the young authors. For example, when writing a list, the scribbling, drawings, or initials were organized in a column pattern. Likewise, when marking the closing in a friendly letter, shorter scribble strings were used to resemble the shorter statements used in conventional letter writing. Another important finding was that there was often a mismatch between the children's written products and their knowledge of genre characteristics as observed in their reading. These students' knowledge about the communicative intent of text seemed to be better developed and more stable than their knowledge of the graphic and symbolic aspects of written language. Therefore, Zecker (1999) concluded that "knowledge about the psychosocial aspects of written language (namely, its format and communicative function) develops more rapidly and is generally more advanced than knowledge about its graphic/symbolic characteristics" (p. 489).

In another study of K-5 students, Donovan and Smolkin (2002) explored and described the children's implicit and explicit knowledge of two specific school genres, story and informational texts, as demonstrated on six different tasks (write a story and an informational text, describe differences between writing a story and writing an informational text, pretend-read a wordless story and information book, orally define storybook and information book, sort books by genre, answer questions about writing). The major finding was that genre may be superseded by the author's aim, intention, or motive. All texts, regardless of their function, fall within two basic types, narrative (a recounting of events) and nonnarrative (attending to a topic). Key to this distinction is temporality. With temporality as a determining factor, biographies, historical recounts, and life-cycle science books would be considered narrative. Under nonnarrative would fall those works in which temporality does not figure (nonnarrative poetry, argument, exposition, and reports).

Finally, in another study, Kamberelis (1999) explored children's working knowledge of narrative, scientific, and poetic genres. Fifty-four kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade children composed original texts and gave oral justifications for why each of their compositions represented the designated genre. All texts were coded for textual features (words per clause, verb tense, temporal connectives, logical connectives, text cohesion), text register (specialized narrative discourse, biological terminology, poetic devices), and text structures (narrative text structure, informational text structure, and poetic text structure). Analyses showed that students had more experience with and more knowledge of narrative genres than either scientific or poetic genres. There were no

major differences between grade levels. The most important finding was that students' knowledge of genres is complex and multiplex.

In conclusion, in *More Than Stories*, Thomas Newkirk (1989) explains the pros and cons of genres. He quotes Donald Murray's warning about genre:

> Genre is a powerful but dangerous lens. It both clarifies and limits. The writer and student must be careful not to see life merely in the stereotyped form with which he or she is most familiar but to look at life with all the possibilities of the genre in mind and to attempt to look at life through different genre (p. 5).

He then goes on to explain, "It would follow that a child who has mastered a repertoire of genres has a number of lenses with which to view experience; genres, while constraining, are also cognitive instruments for making sense of the world" (p.5).

Classroom Talk

> The history of ideas shows that discovery, learning, and creative problem-solving are rarely, if ever, truly individual affairs. All creative thinkers, even those singled out for individual acclaim in the histories of the world, have worked with others and with the ideas of others as well as their own. (Mercer, 1995, p.1)

Language is, therefore, not just a means by which people communicate, it is also a means for people to think and learn together. I will begin this section with a rationale for researching classroom talk and give a description of the types of talk found in classrooms. Next, I will discuss several aspects of the relationship between talk and writing. Finally, I will focus on one forum for classroom talk, peer writing conferences.

Rationale for Researching Classroom Talk

> It is largely through talk that we develop our concepts of self, as members of various social worlds which can be brought into focus and in which we can locate ourselves and recognize the values, rights and obligations which permeate them. As we listen and as we talk, we learn what is necessary to know, do, and say in that area of social life or that setting, and can display the competence necessary to be accepted as a member. (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 15)

It is for these reasons that talk is important as a source of data. In classrooms, classroom talk makes visible the curriculum in both its "manifest" and its "hidden" forms; it brings into view the declared agenda of lessons along with other meanings that derive from wider, non-school contexts which are still actively relevant within the classroom (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). As educators have come to acknowledge the value of talk for its contribution to learning (Vygotsky, 1962) and knowledge construction (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999), discourse analysis has gained status as an important research method.

> Over the last twenty-five years or so, the status of classroom talk has changed markedly. It has been accorded a central place in the processes of learning. What linguists term 'the primacy of speech' has been translated by educators into a new respect for talk that has received strong academic support in psychology, child development, sociolinguistics, and sociology. (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 12)

Types of Talk

Barnes (1976) was one of the first researchers to look at the role talk plays in learning; he described two aspects of classroom talk: speech as communication and

speech as reflection or learning. Vygotsky's (1962) theory of language development also takes into account both functions of language. Specifically, Vygotsky believed that language or speech first appears on the social or interspychological plane. In other words, infants learn to speak as part of learning to be a member of the family, the culture. As children grow older, they begin to use language as a psychological tool for organizing individual thoughts, reasoning, planning, and reviewing actions. They begin talking to themselves as they play with toys. At first they use this "egocentric speech" as an accompaniment to their play, telling themselves what they are doing. Later, they will learn to use speech to plan what they are going to do or recall and re-experience what has already happened. Thus, initially language is used as a cultural tool for communication with others but then develops into a psychological tool. Speech becomes part of one's thinking and imagining. Vygotsky calls this speech inner speech; inner speech is the most accessible part of thought or reflection. Thus, one must consider that children use speech for communication and for learning.

When children listen to a teacher lecture or watch a science experiment, the knowledge that they come away with will depend on what was brought to the lesson. In Piaget's (1971) terms, the child will assimilate the new information and at the same time modify or transform it to fit into her own history of experiences; Piaget calls this accomodation. Classroom learning can best be seen as an interaction between the teacher's meanings and those of the students, so that what the students take away is partly shared and partly unique to each of them. For older children and adults, these transformations can be carried out not only in response to new sense data but also by

communication with other people. This communication with other people is what Barnes (1976) labeled "learning by talking" or exploratory talk.

Exploratory talk is one means by which the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge to the old is carried out. Mercer (1995) defines exploratory talk as talk in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas. The ideas may be challenged and counter-challenged; challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered. In exploratory talk, knowledge is made more publicly accountable and reasoning is more visible in the talk. In exploratory talk, because the students are working toward a meaning, the talk is usually marked by frequent hesitations, rephrasing, false starts, and changes of direction. Often the talk is marked by hypothetical expressions such as, "She could have gone out" or "She probably felt." This hypothetical mode makes exploratory talk easier to sustain because it keeps possibilities open (Barnes, 1976). The more learners control their own language strategies, and the more they are enabled to think aloud, the more they can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypotheses and evaluating them. It should be noted that exploratory talk does not necessarily contribute to the kind of learning that Rumelhart and Norman (1976) refer to as accretion which is the acquisition of a large number of facts or what others refer to as rote learning, but instead contributes to learning in which restructuring of old information is necessary to account for new information.

Barnes (1976) differentiates exploratory talk from what he terms presentational talk that is common in many classrooms. Presentational talk calls for a student to give a brief and concise answer usually in response to a teacher's question. (This type of communication pattern is referred to as the IRE, initiation, response, evaluation, by

Cazden, 2001.) It does not allow students enough opportunity to make new thinking their own since it encourages them to be less concerned about sorting out their ideas than about earning praise by giving an officially approved answer to a question.

Mercer (1995, 2000) distinguishes three types of classroom talk: cumulative, disputational, and exploratory. Cumulative talk is talk in which students share ideas cooperatively and uncritically. The talk is characterized by repetitions, confirmations, and elaborations. Students use this type of talk to construct a "common knowledge" by accumulation. The relationship between the students seems to operate more on implicit concerns for solidarity and trust; students are not striving for control. Disputational talk is characterized by disagreement and individualized decision making. There are few attempts to pool resources or to offer constructive suggestions or criticism. The characteristic discourse features of disputational talk are short exchanges consisting of assertions and challenges or counter-assertions. In disputational talk, knowledge is flaunted rather than shared, differences of opinions are stressed rather than resolved, the relationship between students is competitive, and the general orientation is defensive; students are striving for control. The characteristics of exploratory talk have already been discussed. Mercer stresses that the three types of talk are idealizations and are rarely found in pure form. He uses the types to describe the relationship between the ways in which we use language to solve problems and create knowledge and to describe the ways people interact with each other when communicating.

The Relationship Between Talk and Writing

The relationship between talk and writing is complex; the language processes have been paired and differentiated in various ways. Writing and talk, along with reading and listening, are the four language processes. Traditionally, linguists have paired listening and talk as first order processes because they are learned without any formal instruction and reading, and writing as second order processes because they tend to be learned initially only with the aid of formal and systematic instruction (Emig, 1977). Another pairing has been based on two criteria: the matters of origination and of graphic recording. In this pairing, writing and talk are paired together because they both generate original thought, although only writing generates a graphic recording. Reading and listening create thought or recreate it, but they do not produce original thought (Emig, 1977). Vygotksky (1962) and sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1973) distinguish speech and writing by suggesting that the two processes spring from different organic sources and represent different language functions. Vygotsky states that written speech is a separate linguistic function from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Emig (1977) lists eleven ways in which talk and writing differ. The eleven differences are:

(1) Writing is learned behavior; talking is natural…

(2) Writing then is an artificial process; talking is not.

(3) Writing is a technological device… talking is organic, natural, earlier.

(4) Most writing is slower than most talking.

(5) Writing is stark, barren, even naked as a medium; talking is rich, luxuriant, inherently redundant

(6) Talk leans on the environment; writing must provide its own context

(7) With writing, the audience is usually absent; with talking, the listener is usually present.

(8) Writing usually results in a visible graphic product; talking usually does not.

(9) Perhaps because there is a product involved, writing tends to be a more responsible and committed act than talking.

(10) It can be said that throughout history, an aura, … has encircled the written word; the spoken word has…been treated mundanely…

(11) Because writing is often a representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is more readily a form and source of learning than talking (p. 7).

Another aspect of the relationship between talk and writing is that both processes spring from social interactions with others. Bakhtin and his colleague, Volosinov, have focused on how dialogue shapes both language and thought. This perspective has come to be known as dialogism (Nystrand, 1997). A dialogic perspective on discourse and learning starts with the premise that discourse is essentially structured by the interaction of the conversants, with each playing a particular social role. Instructional discourse is shaped by classroom participation structures and authority relationships (Nystrand, 1997; Barnes, 1976; Philips, 1972; Cazden, 2001). Thus, to understand conversation requires one to understand the nature of community life that generates and maintains conversation (Bruffee, 1984). Vygotsky (1978) also supports this notion with his belief that all functions in a child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level (interspycholocal level) and then on the personal level (intrapsychological plane). Britton and his colleagues (Ackerman, 1993) developed a British model of literacy that

emphasized expressive writing because it was the form and function of writing closest to Vygotsky's notion of inner speech. The British model promoted speech as the fundamental vehicle for self-expression and meaning making in young children as they move out into the world. The model presented two important progressions: the movement from self-expression to the three forms of public discourse (transactional, expressive, and poetic) as part of the composing process of writers, and the development of children from a speech-centered world toward the fluency of mature writers as self-expression leads to public forms Thus, a person's thoughts are influenced by his interactions with others. This has both good and bad aspects. It is good because in thought some of the limitations of conversation are absent, such as there are no differences among the participants in spoken vernacular. On the other hand, in thought some limitations like ethnocentrism, personal anxiety, and economic interests, may constrain thinking just as they can constrain conversation (Bruffee, 1984).

Another relationship between talk and writing is that both processes lead to learning. Emig (1977) writes about the correspondences between writing and successful learning strategies. In both writing and learning, reinforcement and feedback are important. In writing, the text is not only immediately available for review and re-evaluation, but it is a record of thought. In both activities connections must be made. Writing establishes explicit and systematic conceptual groups through lexical, syntactic, and rhetoric devices. Vygotsky (1962) notes that writing makes a unique demand in that the writer must engage in "deliberate semantics." Such structuring is necessary for Vygotksy because he sees writing as an extension of inner speech which is maximally compact just as writing is maximally detailed. Thus, writing demands that one make

connections and build relationships. The third correspondence that Emig (1977) makes is that both processes are self-rhythmed. One writes best as one learns best, at one's own pace. Writing, because of its slowness, allows one to make connections between past, present, and future experiences, thus, producing meaning.

Another connection is posited by Jerome Brunner (in Emig, 1977). He states that there are three major ways humans represent and deal with actuality: enactive: we learn by doing with our hands, iconic: we learn by looking at depictions in an image, and symbolic: we learn by restatement in words or thinking. The very nature of writing requires one to think (symbolic) as one transforms experience into verbal language that is then shaped into a graphic product (iconic) by the use of one's hand (enactive). If the most effective learning occurs when learning is reinforced, then writing, through its inherent reinforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain, marks a powerful mode of learning.

Thus, now that I have written about some of the ways that the relationship between talk and writing has been characterized, I will turn to the role talk plays in writing. Vygotsky, Burner, and Luria (in Emig, 1977) have all pointed out that higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis, seem to develop most fully with the support system of language, particularly, it seems of written language. Sweigart (1991), in his study of 58, college preparatory twelfth grade students and their English teacher confirms this assumption. In the study, Sweigart explored whether exploratory talk in small groups can help students assimilate new information on complex topics more effectively than can participation in a class discussion or a lecture. During the study students read a passage and then participated in one of the treatment conditions (lecture, class discussion,

small group discussion). The students were then asked to complete four activities after each instructional encounter; they were to write down all the ideas they had about five concept words that were related to the topic, complete an attitude survey, and write both a summary and analysis paper about the topic. The results indicated that participating in the small group discussion was the most beneficial to the students as they prepared to write as judged by the results of the content knowledge activities. Similarly, the quality of the students' analysis/opinion papers was judged as superior after participating in the small group discussions. The quality of the summary paper did not improve after participation. This finding was consistent with Hillocks (1986) assertion that summary writing is less complex and less analytic writing and thus would not benefit from exploratory talk. Such an outcome illustrates the need to use talk activities only for those tasks for which they are most appropriately beneficial. The attitude survey results indicated that students prefer working in classes where they use talk as a tool for learning. Thus, Sweigart's study lent support to the notion that talk and writing lead to learning.

In another study, Wells and Wells (1992) looked at ways that teachers can implement collaborative work among children. Specifically they looked at how talk can lead to better writing. This was one focus in the ten-year longitudinal study of links between home and school that was conducted in England. They found that when students collaborate to solve a problem they must achieve intersubjectivity; or in other words, they must make their ideas and proposals known and understood by the other person. In doing this, the participant not only makes ideas more explicit but usually comes to understand more clearly the ideas being proposed because often these ideas will be challenged, and the participant must justify his or her reasoning. One means of justification is through

building connections between a new idea and a previous idea. Through the process of collaborative talk, students practice being explicit, making connections, and justifying their opinions or ideas. These features are precisely the sort of attributes that are held to be characteristic of written discourse. Thus, talk can lead a student to better writing. One forum for talk about writing in the writing workshop is peer conferences.

Peer Conferencing

Instruction in the writing process at the elementary level has regularly included opportunities for students to interact with one another (Graves, 1983). One forum for interaction is peer conferences. In a peer conference, students share and respond to a classmate's writing. Questions are asked about missing information and new perspectives can surface and conflicting material can be discussed and then restructured or clarified (Bruffee, 1985, Dahl, 1988). According to Kaufman (1963), "When children talk honestly about their work they hear themselves and are often able to solve their own problems. They learn, perhaps for the first time, what they know" (p. 8). These conversations can be face-to-face, displaced into writing, or a combination of the two forms. Bruffee (1985) contends that writers need to return their writing to the context of face-to-face conversation because

> knowing each other's work helps writers develop responsibility for what they have to say and the courage to say it, through the immediate response of a community of sympathetic peers. Immediate response also gives writers a sense of a real and live audience. It helps them see what they have put on the page. (p. 137)

Sharing work also provides the opportunity for students to learn what other writers are interested in by hearing what other writers write about, thus, expanding one's own repertoire of topics (Ray, 1999). Students gain valuable feedback from peer conference conversations which some learners use to revise their drafts (Gere & Abbott, 1985).

There are two main types of feedback, criterion-based feedback and reader-based feedback (Elbow, 1981). Criterion-based feedback judges or evaluates one's work against a certain criteria. It focuses on the quality of the content of the writing: the ideas, the perceptions, the writer's techniques, the point of view, the organization of the paper, the language usage and the mistakes. Reader-based feedback tells the writer what the text does to readers. Reader-based feedback usually consists of summaries, images for the writing and the transaction it creates with the author, and a moment by moment explanation of the reader's reactions. Elbow (1981) claims that reader-based feedback is more useful than criterion-based feedback because "if you neglect reader-based feedback you will miss many of the main advantages and pleasures of the whole feedback process" (p. 245).

Dahl (1988), on the other hand, found in her study of a fourth-grade classroom that students "came to expect substantive help from their peers" (p. 173). During the initial ten weeks of the writing workshop, reader-based feedback was given, but in the later period, during which time instruction focused on revision techniques such as adding words that describe, moving or deleting information, working on clarity, and choosing among a variety of leads, feedback was criterion-based and showed learners' growing concern with revision. In this case, instructional context strongly influenced how learners went about conferencing with a peer.

Another influence on peer conferencing is instruction on how to provide peer criticism. Bruffee (1985) believes that "peer criticism is first of all a learning process" (p. 142). Most students cannot, to begin with, evaluate their own work or each other's work very well (Bruffee, 1985, Elbow, 1981, Ray, 2001). They have to learn to evaluate each other's work, and they have to learn to trust each other's judgment. Bomer (1995) has reservations about the ability of adolescents to trust each other's judgment. He contends that "at this stage of life, when their [adolescents'] main job is to define themselves in relation to peers, it's just too socially dangerous to say anything, even a question, that might be interpreted as criticism" (p. 37). But even with this reservation, Bomer sees the need for peer conferencing because "writers need cheerleaders to keep them writing" (p. 37). Viewing conferences in a much more important light, Lagana (cited in Gere & Abbot, 1985) believes that "conferences improve critical thinking, organization, and appropriateness of writing" (p. 363).

Collaborative Learning

Peer conferences are a form of collaborative learning and are informed by research conducted in this area. Collaborative learning harnesses the powerful educative force of peer influence that had been, and largely still is, ignored and hence wasted by traditional forms of education (Bruffee, 1984). Oakeshott (1962) argues that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is our ability to participate in unending conversation. He also contends that many of the social forms and conventions of conversation parallel the forms and conventions of reflective thought. Thus, he states that we can think because we can talk, and we think in ways we have learned to talk. Dawes, Mercer, and

Wegerif's report of research (2000) on exploratory talk lends support to Oakeshott's contention because they found that students who developed an exploratory way of using language did better on activities/problems that required rational, justified reasoning. The inference writing teachers should take from Oakeshott's line of reasoning is that they should provide opportunities for students to engage in conversations among themselves about the reading and writing processes as often as possible and should ensure that the talk is similar in as many ways as possible to the way in which they eventually want the students to read and write because how students talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way they will write (Bruffee, 1984). In this section, I discuss the underlying ideology that informs the use of collaborative learning and explain the concerns about collaborative learning.

Teaching and Collaborative Learning

The underlying ideology that informs the use of collaborative learning is to prepare students for collective growth and liberation. Slavin (1987) looked at collaborative learning from both a behavioral and humanistic perspective. In the behavioral view, collaborative learning is a form of group contingencies; rather than elevate the importance of individual achievement, teachers encourage students to work within a collective structure and reward group efforts more than individual ones. The humanistic view emphasizes understandings arising from peer interaction. Slavin, however, found that it is the combination of group rewards based on group members' individual learning and peer interaction on learning tasks that is necessary to produce learning gains. Of 35 studies of cooperative learning methods that used group rewards

based on the sum of group members' individual learning, 30 found significantly greater achievement for cooperative groups than for control classes; five found no differences. These data support Ladson-Billings' (1994) push for classrooms in which students view each other as extended family. In such classrooms students are responsible for monitoring one another's academic work and personal behavior and for solving group problems. Group members may talk with one another and provide academic assistance. Webb (1985) found that the students who learn best from cooperative interaction are those who give and receive elaborated explanations.

One of the goals of collaborative learning is to prepare students for "liberation." This goal is accomplished by developing a social context in which democratic communities encourage the "citizens" to achieve independence of thought and the freedom to express it responsibly within the confines of the greater social good (Dewey, 1966). To encourage these qualities, researchers Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2000), organized O'Donnell-Allen's high-school classroom so that students had input into the curriculum and classroom organization and had latitude in deciding how to act within the overall structure of the classroom. Keeping with Dewey's (1990) view that investigations should spring from student interests, students' needs and concerns motivated much of the work. Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen found that while promoting certain types of behavior, the social context of the classroom lacked the power to determine action in the collaborative groups. Within the culture of the class, small groups formed their own local cultures, or idiocultures (Fine, 1987). Each group formed a relational framework that subsequently guided its interactions. These relationships varied considerably from group to group and had different consequences for both the equity of

contribution within the groups and, in some cases, the appearance of the group product that resulted from their effort. It was found that groups fell into one of three social process patterns: productive (contributed to the production of the product), constructive (promoted social cohesion), and destructive (undermined social cohesion). Of the four groups that were studied, two groups were characterized by cohesiveness and two by destructiveness. The authors concluded that setting the stage for a democratic classroom is not always enough to insure that the goals of a group will be compatible with the goals of the teacher. The study painted a picture of collaborative groups as infinitely complex, dynamic, and difficult to predict from knowledge of the context alone.

Controversy and Collaborative Learning

The aim of collaborative learning is to reach consensus through an expanding conversation. The word consensus is problematic; one line of criticism argues that the use of consensus in collaborative learning is "an inherently dangerous and potentially totalitarian practice that stifles individual voice and creativity, suppresses differences, and enforces conformity" (Trimbur, 1989, p. 602). Critics of collaborative learning (Beade, 1987; Johnson, 1986) want to rescue the sovereignty and autonomy of the individual from what some have called "peer indoctrination classes." They fear a "group think" mentality. Trimbur (1989) counters this attack with his idea that what these critics fear is not the loss of individuality but that individuals will unite against those in power; they fear that consensus will enable individuals to empower each other through social activity. He also contends that the notion of consensus needs to be revised to include the notion that consensus does not automatically mean accommodation. Trimbur wants

collaborative learning to be a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other. The consensus that he wants from students is not based so much on collective agreement as on collective explanations of how people differ, where their differences come from, and whether they can live and work together with these differences.

Other critics like Greg Myers (1986) and Lensmire (2000) do not worry so much about the autonomy of the individual because they recognize that selves, knowledge, and discourse are all socially constructed, but they are concerned that advocates of collaborative learning have overlooked the potential danger of validating uneven power structures, reinforcing the power of the dominant culture, and overlooking the wider social forces that structure the production of knowledge. To understand the production and validation of knowledge, Myers (1986) argues we need to know not just how knowledge communities operate consensually but how knowledge and its means of production are distributed in an unequal, exclusionary social order and embedded in hierarchical relations of power.

In summary, the use of collaborative learning in education has been seen as both beneficial since the 1970s when it was proclaimed to be the answer to problems associated with ability-groups or tracking (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and controversial as student empowerment and issues of power have come to be addressed by educators (Myers, 1986).

Literature Review Reflections

The issues of the talk-writing relationship, of the development of genre, of collaborative learning, and of the writing process model all contributed to the theoretical grounding for an investigation of the language of writing groups, and at the same time the issues point to the need for further investigation. For example, after reading Sweigart's (1991) study, I realized the need for a question that addressed the benefits of talk for all types of writing, and subsequently, taking my cue from Donovan and Smolkin (2002) examined narrative and nonnarrative or informational texts. The review also provided technical knowledge which guided my study's methodology. Specifically, Lensmire's (2000) discussion of "friendship groups" guided my decisions on how to form writing groups. Finally, the literature review on teacher research that emphasized the importance of describing the teaching/learning process in specific contexts led me to conclude that a sociolinguistic and ethnographic approach to my research would be appropriate because sociolinguists study language in the context of its use and ethnographers of communication study everyday life in ordinary places such as classrooms. In retrospect, writing the literature review was much like doing teacher research. It was about searchings, re-searchings, and findings.

Chapter 3: Method

Research Design

From the perspective of a teacher researcher, I examined the influence of one type of classroom communication, peer writing group conferencing talk, on the writing process. Four of five common characteristics of teacher research were employed. One, being present daily in the learning environment provided an emic, or insider perspective on the learning and research processes. Because of this view, an overall view of each participant's abilities and liabilities was built from daily situation-specific observations; it should be noted, however, that because of the research design (taping multiple student conferences simultaneously), the researcher could not assume a participant role. Two, in teacher research theory and practice are interrelated and blurred. Specifically, Lensmire's (2000) discussion of "friendship groups" guided my decision on how to form writing groups. Third, according to Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2000), "A cornerstone of teacher research is that it is pragmatic and action oriented; that is, it involves reflecting on one's teaching and practice, inquiring about it, exploring it, and then taking action to improve or alter it" (p. 78). As a result of reflection, several changes were made to the original research design. For example, the original intent was for the students not to fill out any forms during the peer writing conferences, but after observing several student conferences, it became apparent that they were frustrated because they did not have a method for recording group member suggestions. In response, I generated several alternatives and suggested them to the students. Also, trouble-shooting conferences with the all-male group, which were not in the original research design, were instigated as a result of observing the social interaction of the students. Finally, teacher research is

intentional and systematic. Using sociolinguistic and ethnographic methods, data collection consisted of field notes, student interviews, student work, student surveys, video tapes, and transcriptions from audio tapes.

Research Questions

The principal research questions addressed in this study were:

- How can talk in peer group writing conferences be characterized?
- Will talk about writing in peer group conferences influence the outcome of the final draft? In other words, in what ways will suggestions given in the conferences be taken into account and acted upon?

In order to answer these research questions, peer writing group conferences and individual and group interviews were audio-taped; student essays and field notes were analyzed, and two student surveys were administered. Tapes were transcribed and coded using Grounded Theory methodology as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Open coding of each conversation idea unit (Gere & Abbot, 1985) produced the following three emergent categories:

- A list of the functions of talk in conferences
- A picture of the patterns of talk in the conferences, and
- A description of how the talk of individuals co-mingled to produce new ideas.

During axial coding the subcategory, functions of talk, was coded according to one of six specific subject matter categories, procedures and processes, content, form, mechanics, reasons and explanations, and responses (Gere & Abbot, 1985).

Research Site

Lake Elementary, a suburban school located in the Texas Hill-Country, is an exemplary school according to the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) rating. There were 819 students, 442 males, and 377 females. Following is the ethnic make-up of the 819 students:

White, not of Hispanic ----------89.9 percent

Hispanic----------6.6 percent

Black, not of Hispanic origin ----------1.0 percent

Asian or Pacific Islander----------2.1 percent

American Indian or Alaskan Native----------.5 percent

It should be noted that the demographic chart, provided by the school's registrar, did not include a "Mixed" or "Other" category. If the category existed, one of the study's participants would have fallen into the category. Twenty-five students (.03 percent) were eligible to participate in the free/reduced lunch program.

Participants were drawn from the two fifth-grade Language Arts classes that I taught. According to the Home Language Survey which was part of every student's permanent file, English was the primary language for all eligible participants. (The Russian-speaking ESL student was adopted by an English-speaking family. Therefore, only English was spoken in the home.)

The two Language Arts classes had diverse academic populations. One class was the designated Inclusion Class for the fifth grade. Eleven of the 21 students received special services. Services were provided by the special education department teachers, the

reading specialist/dyslexia teacher, school psychologist, speech therapist, adult mentors, TAKS tutors, and English as a Second Language support staff. There were nine girls and 12 boys in the class; 19 of the students were white and two were Asian.

The other Language Arts class also had 21 students; six students were labeled gifted and talented and participated in a pull-out program five hours per week. One student was monitored thirty minutes per semester by the special education support staff. There were 11 girls and 10 boys in the class; three students were Hispanic (one student was labeled Hispanic but was actually of mixed heritage); one was Asian, and 17 were white.

The writing workshop ran for approximately fifty-five minutes daily. The daily routine was as follows:

10 minutes: students wrote in their writer's notebooks

15 minutes: mini-lesson

25 minutes: essay writing/conferencing time

5 minutes: students completed writer's logs and shared writing

Instructional Context

The writing workshop took place daily for fifty-five minutes. The inclusion class met at 8:00 A.M. and the advanced class at 10:40 A.M. Each session began with students writing in their writer's notebooks for approximately ten minutes. This was followed by a teacher-directed mini-lesson. Mini-lessons covered genre study, writing techniques, mechanics, and process lessons. When students began a new genre, the first mini-lesson was a genre study. For example, before the informative essay the students examined

articles from *Time for Kids* magazines. They noticed the articles contained quotes; they noticed both sides of an issue were presented, and they noticed how the articles were formatted. The model used for the narrative essay was the book, *Dies Drear,* by Virginia Hamilton (1984). As the story was read orally, the students followed along in their own books. After reading a chapter, writing techniques and narrative components like the lead and introduction of characters were discussed. Other mini-lessons covered topics such as how to take notes, how to punctuate quotations, how to incorporate sensory language, and sequencing (see appendix for complete listing of mini-lessons). The mini-lessons usually lasted 10 to 15 minutes and were followed by various writing activities: brainstorming, researching, writing, conferencing with peers or teacher, editing, or publishing. The end of the work time was signaled by the announcement that it was time to document the day's activities in their student writing log. The log consisted of a running record of what the students accomplished each day.

An important aspect of the writing workshop was the peer conference groups. Research guided the structure of the writing groups. Drawing ideas from the book, *Writing Without Teachers* (Elbow, 1973) and from previous experiences with regimented response formats taken from *Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing* (Carroll & Wilson, 1993), I made the decision that the major goal of the writing groups was to have natural, free-flowing conversations in an environment in which all students contributed and felt empowered to make decisions. Therefore, two decisions were made: Group members were not assigned roles, and students were not directed to use specific forms.

Based on my previous observations of collaborative groups in which certain students dominated the discussion while others were silenced and from research I had

read, the decision was made to teach the students how to work collaboratively. As Spear (1988) wrote:

> Students are no more expert at contributing productively to groups than they are at writing. And teachers can no more expect them to write well without instruction than to discuss writing effectively without help. In fact, given the rhetorical similarities of writing and discussing writing, many student shortcomings manifest in one medium are also reflected in the other---shortcomings in discovering ideas, developing and elaborating thoughts, reading, reviewing and responding critically, perceiving connections, and exploring alternative organization (pp. 7-8).

Thus, in the fall, the students participated in a series of talk lessons taken from the book, *Thinking Together: A Programme of Activities for Developing Thinking Skills at KS2* (Dawes, Mercer, Wegerif, 2000). The talk lessons focused on establishing group rules (all group members contribute, be open to new ideas, don't think you are always right, listen to all discussion, stay focused, no off-task talk), practicing procedures, such as each student contributing to the discussion (in one lesson students tallied the number of times each group member contributed to the conversation), and developing exploratory talk, or talk in which reasons or justifications are given for opinions and ideas and ideas are elaborated. Mercer (1995) defined exploratory talk as talk in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas. The ideas may be challenged and counter-challenged; challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered. In exploratory talk, knowledge is made more publicly accountable and reasoning is more visible in the talk. To practice using exploratory talk, students were given hypothetical

situations that the group had to solve. For example, in one lesson the students were presented with information about five families and six dogs. The task was to match a dog with a family (the sixth dog was put down). Completing the task required the students to present ideas and give justifications for their opinions. The development of exploratory talk was crucial because Webb (1985) found that students who learn best from cooperative interaction are those who give and receive elaborated explanations.

Collaborative groups were formed based on Lensmire's (2000) work on collaborative groups Lensmire used Dewey's (1916/1966) conception of communities to evaluate what he termed "friendship groups." According to Dewey, a successful community is one in which the group members share aesthetic, material and intellectual interests, and the program of one member has worth for the experience of other members. His second criterion was that group members positively interact with other groups. Using this framework, Lensmire advocates students forming their own "friendship" groups. The collaborative groups for this study were formed by students selecting one "friend." All students chose a same-gender friend. The "friendship groups" were then formed by pairing two pairs together. The ideal was for each group to consist of two girls and two boys, but ultimately six groups participated in the study, five mixed-gender groups and one all-male group.

The purpose of the writing groups was to influence the thinking, learning, and writing of each group member. According to Spear (1988), whenever writers seek responses from others by verbalizing ideas or sharing drafts, the process of writing becomes a social one. Sharing allows writers to hear what their ideas sound like and to request feedback as they continue to think about a topic, draft, or revision. The feedback,

both verbal and nonverbal, influences and often shapes thinking. Piaget (as cited in Mercer, 1995), "sketched out a role for the significance of interaction between peers—it helped children to 'decentre,' to become sensitive to other perspectives on the world other than their own" (p. 90). The conferences, therefore, were organized in such a way that the students could draw from their group members' expertise at each stage of the writing process. For the informative essay, the students participated in three conferences: a brainstorming conference, a first draft conference, and a rubric conference. The foci of the conferences were: brainstorming conference---idea generation, first draft conference—suggestions to improve first draft, rubric conference—evaluate final product. For the narrative essay the students participated in two conferences, first draft and rubric. (Idea generation for the narrative essay came from the reading of the book, *Dies Drear*.)

The writing groups were structured to incorporate the findings of Slavin's (1987) study of collaborative learning and Rief's (1992) study of writing assessment. Slavin looked at collaborative learning from both a behavioral and humanistic perspective. He found that it is the combination of group rewards based on group members' individual learning and peer interaction on learning tasks that is necessary to produce learning gains. Therefore, the group members' individual conferencing grade was the average of the group member's final grades. For example, if the grades on the final essay for a group were 95, 92, 90 and 75, each group member would receive an 88 for their conferencing grade. Rief (1992) found that "students who were immersed in writing were as effective at identifying the most effective pieces and the criteria that made those pieces good, as the most experienced writing teachers" (p. 122). Therefore, in the rubric conferences the

students graded each other's work based on the criteria jointly set by the students and teacher when the rubric was created. A student's final grade was an average of the group's grade and the teacher's grade. For example if a student's group grade was 94 and the teacher's grade was 90, the final grade would be a 92. This structure empowered the groups and reinforced the importance of their role in the writing process. According to Rief (1992), "by jointly establishing the criteria for evaluating the written work, the students have ownership in what are considered the characteristics of effective writing for a certain genre and understand clearly how their work will be evaluated" (p. 122).

Three transformations occurred as the groups matured. One, 23 of the 24 members naturally assumed one or more roles. Two, because problems occurred when students were not able to remember group members' suggestions, several recording procedures were tested, and three, the focus of the conferences shifted depending on the stage of the writing when conferences were held. For example, during the scheduled time for the first draft conferences, several students had not begun to write so suggestions were idea-based and not writing-specific.

Participants

Fifth-grade students were chosen because that was the grade-level that I taught. Three peer writing groups from each writing workshop (two fifth-grade Language Arts classes) participated in this study. In total there were six writing groups. Each writing group consisted of four students. First, students selected a friend, preferably one who held similar interests. In reality, nine pairs chose each other. Six students did not have a friend to pair with and consequently they partnered with the other students who

did not select a specific person. Next, I formed groups by joining two pairs together to form a writing group. Three factors, compatibility, gender, and writing ability level as judged by fourth-grade writing TAKS scores, were taken into account when forming the four-member conferencing groups. Ideally, I wanted to group two girls and two boys together, for the four students to represent a range of writing ability as judged by their TAKS writing scores, and for all students to be compatible. Ultimately, my plan did not go as I had hoped. In the inclusion class, there were more boys than girls. Therefore, one of the groups consisted of four boys. The same group also consisted of three special-needs students and one on-level student; the other two groups drawn from the inclusion class consisted of all on-level students. In the advanced class, two groups consisted of three on-level students and one gifted and talented student. One group had two on-level students and two gifted and talented students.

Groups were formed in October for the purpose of participating in the pilot study, "Classroom Talk During the Writing Workshop." As I transcribed the tapes for that study, I took notes on how the members of each group worked together and to what extent the four members were using exploratory talk when completing the Talk Lesson activities.

There is little research on talk in peer-response writing groups. Spear (1988) states, "One of the most perplexing gaps between theory and practice in teaching writing is the use of peer response groups" (p. v.) Therefore, participants for this study were drawn from the writing groups that worked well together (completed tasks in a timely fashion and interacted positively) and used exploratory talk because my aim was to discover what peer readers can do for a writer. Three groups were chosen from each class. At the time

the groups were chosen, four groups were not selected to participate in the study. One group in each class was not chosen because several of the group members did not have parent permission to participate in the study. The other two groups, two all-female groups, were not chosen because they did not meet the criteria (completed tasks in a timely fashion, talked in an exploratory manner, and interacted positively). Instead, the group members bickered, directed hurtful personal remarks to other group members, and did not complete tasks in a timely fashion. (Eventually, the two female groups, with much teacher intervention, learned to interact in a positive manner and talk in an exploratory style.) All eight groups participated in the same writing workshop activities: writing in writer's notebooks, participating in mini-lessons and peer and teacher conferences, completing writer's logs and sharing writing. All students completed writing surveys, and all groups were interviewed. The only difference between the groups that participated in the study and the groups that did not participate was the groups that were not included in the study did not tape their first-draft and rubric conferences. It should be noted that during the duration of the study, reading groups were creating scripts for Reader's Theater presentations. Students who did not participate in the study had the opportunity to tape their reader's theater conversations. Therefore, all students, at some point during the school-year, had the opportunity to have their collaborative conversations taped.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study consisted of two writing rubrics and two surveys. The writing rubrics were developed jointly by the students and teacher because

of Rief's (1992) finding that students were as effective as experienced writing teachers at identifying effective writing. In the study, Rief put together a packet of 22 student pieces composed in a variety of genres. The writing was ranked from most effective to least effective by hundreds of kindergarten-through college-level teachers. In addition to the aforementioned finding, two additional findings were discovered: it is far easier to identify poor writing than good writing, and writing is subjective. In discussing the criteria for effective writing, the readers (teachers) revealed that they bring all kinds of biases, experiences, and likes or dislikes for a topic or genre to a piece; these affect their reading. Therefore, by jointly establishing the criteria for evaluating the written work, the students had ownership in what was considered the characteristics of effective writing for a certain genre and understood clearly how their work would be evaluated.

The first survey asked the students to make a list of suggestions that were made and discussed during a writing conference and then from the list to select two suggestions, one suggestion they acted upon and one they did not incorporate into their final draft. The students were then to explain their choices. The second survey only asked students to select two suggestions (a list of suggestions was not created), one suggestion they acted upon and one suggestion they did not incorporate into their final draft and explain their choices. In addition, the students were asked to comment on any aspect of the writing program. According to Rief (1992), one of the most important aspects of writing is for students "to gain independence as learners, knowing and trusting their own choices" (p.4).

Data Collection

Data were collected from a variety of sources including field notes of writing workshop activities; audio tapes of peer writing group conferences; video tapes of selected writing workshop activities; student written work from two essays, an informative essay and a narrative essay; student surveys; and student interviews.

Field Notes

Throughout the research study I took detailed field notes of the writing workshop activities. Field notes consisted of observations made during the writing workshop; teacher reflections about writing workshop activities; pertinent teacher lesson plan information such as documenting mini-lessons; and participant information such as student absences, interactions, and feelings.

Audio and Video Tapes

Writing group conferences (peer conferences) and student interviews were audio taped. The importance of audiotape recordings of moments of talk in the classroom was explained by a teacher in the Brookline Teacher Research Seminar:

> There's no other way to honestly get back at that moment in time and know what was going on without having a transcript. There's no other way to do it. You can take notes afterwards and that's helpful, but it's not as honest and powerful—as real—as having a transcript….(Cazden, 2001, p. 6)

Another member of the group pointed out that taping validates the children as well.

> When I am taping or when I am listening closely to what's going on, there's something that happens as I investigate. [The kids] kind of feel like that's

> important…They're not uncomfortable with it. It makes them feel like people are learning from them (Cazden, 2001, p. 7).

Audio tape transcription was guided by Ochs' (1999) rule that the transcript should reflect only the particular interests to be examined. As such, only talk about writing was transcribed; directions were not transcribed. According to Ochs (1999),

> One of the important features of a transcript is that it should not have too much information. A transcript that is too detailed is difficult to follow and assess. A more useful transcript is a more selective one…But selectivity should not be random and implicit. Rather, the transcriber should be conscious of the filtering process….(p. 168)

Transcription symbols for verbal and nonverbal behavior followed a modified orthography such as that adopted by Sacks and Schegloff (1974). The unit of analysis was an idea unit as defined by Chafe (1980). According to Chafe (1980),

> People are conscious at different times of different things. It seems that how people use language depends very much on what they are conscious of from one moment to the next—on the focus of their internal attention, coupled with a concern for what is going on in the consciousness of the listener. (p. 9)

Consequently, a property of spontaneous speech is that it is produced, not in a flowing stream, but in a series of brief spurts that Chafe (1980) termed "idea units."

The video tapes were viewed but not transcribed. The video tapes served as a resource to check or verify information because I was unable to observe all three groups, plus other students, simultaneously. Because of limited electrical outlets, the video tapes

were primarily used to tape mini-lessons. Most peer group writing conferences were not video taped.

Student Written Work

Two sets of written work (a narrative set and an informative set) were collected for each participant. Written work included the following components: first draft, revision draft, editing form, work log, and final draft. Final drafts were analyzed.

Student Survey

Two surveys were administered, one after the completion of each essay. The first survey asked the students to make a list of suggestions that were made and discussed during a writing conference and then from the list to select two suggestions, one suggestion they acted upon and one they did not incorporate into their final draft. The students were to explain their choices.

The second survey only asked students to select two suggestions, one suggestion they acted upon and one suggestion they did not incorporate into their final draft and explain their choices. The students were then asked to comment on any aspect of the writing program.

Student Interviews

Because the goal of the student interviews was for the students to provide information about their writing, their writing process, their feelings about writing and writing conferences, and their feelings about working collaboratively, a qualitative interview was conducted, although standardized items were appended. According to Weiss (1994), qualitative interviews should be utilized when the research aims are: to

develop detailed descriptions, integrate multiple perspectives, describe a process, develop holistic descriptions, and learn how events are interpreted.

The student interviews had two main foci. One focus was to assess the effectiveness of the collaborative writing group. "Writing groups help students learn how writers behave and to become helpful and productive members of a community of effective writers" (Bruffee, 1985, p. 28). However, as the literature on group process demonstrates (Lensmire, 2000; Dyson, 1993, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen, 2000) successful groups are fragile things indeed. Groups assume a life of their own and there are a number of issues that can combine to make peer discussion of writing a sometimes fruitless endeavor: a tradition of teacher-centered education, a vague or unclear understanding of what constitutes quality in thinking and writing, and self-consciousness, self-doubt, or shyness (Spear, 1988).

The second focus was to assess under what circumstances the talk proved valuable in helping the students prepare for and write their essays. In a study conducted by Sweigart (1991), he found that the gains and advantages of the talk conditions for opinion essay writing were not evident in summary writing tasks. He explained that this finding was consistent with previous assertions that summary writing is less complex and less demanding than analytic writing (Hillocks, 1986). "Such an outcome further illustrates the need to use well-constructed talk activities only for those tasks for which they are most appropriately beneficial" (Sweigart, 1991, p. 485).

The interviews took place after the completion of each essay. In the informative interview, each student was interviewed individually. The interview began with the

student taking the lead to discuss whatever he or she wanted to. On February 24th I wrote the following fieldnote:

> The interviews felt so much better today. I don't know if it was because I got in a groove or if because I realized that the value of the interviews was to see what the students had to say. There was no definitive structure so I needed to just go with the flow. The interviews produced some very valuable insights.

Following is a list of interview questions for the informative interview and the number of students who responded to the question.

Informative Interview:

1. What would you like to discuss that pertains to your writing, writing group, writing process, teacher/student conferences, feelings, or the writer's workshop? (23/24 responded)
2. What role do you play in your writing group? (24/24 responded)
3. You participated in four conferences while working on your persuasive piece. Which conference was most beneficial to you and why. (20/24)
4. Walk me through the process you went through or the steps you went through to write the final draft of your persuasive paper. (20/24)
5. Describe how your writing group has influenced you as a writer or your writing. (23/24)
6. Describe yourself as a writer today compared to yourself as a writer before you entered fifth-grade. (19/24)
7. Has there been a particular piece of writing or a writing event such as a conference or when you shared your writing that stands out in your mind as a

time when you felt like a "real author." (4/24)

8. Other comments (14/24)

After the narrative essay, each peer writing group was interviewed. Each interview began by reviewing the narrative essay rubrics. The following questions then commenced:

1. Is there something you want to say about your writing group? (2/6 groups responded)
2. Next year I plan to form writing groups again. What suggestions do you have for me? (4/6 groups responded)
3. How did your writing group influence your writing? (4/6 groups responded)
4. How did you react to suggestions? (4/6 groups responded)
5. Compare your experiences with the informative and narrative essays. (5/6 groups responded)

Data Analysis

Throughout the duration of the project, I collected and analyzed data and wrote thoughts and findings in an effort to paint a detailed picture of the relationship between classroom talk about writing and student writing. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently during the research.

Data collected throughout the study were analyzed using a variety of qualitative methodologies. Field notes, transcripts of peer group writing conferences, and interviews were coded using Grounded Theory methodology as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Grounded Theory methodology utilizes open, axial, and systematic coding to

ground emerging theories. During open coding, data were broken down into emergent categories; concepts were identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this was accomplished was the asking of questions about data and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences. Similar data were labeled and grouped to form categories. Axial coding was the process of relating subcategories to a category. During selective coding, the categories that seemed to represent the core issues were identified.

For this study the transcriptions of the peer writing group conferences were divided into idea units. Idea units, as defined by Chafe (1980), are segments of discourse that coincide with a person's focus of attention. The idea underlying the idea units is that spontaneous speech is not produced in a flowing stream but in a series of brief spurts which reflect the speaker's object of consciousness. These spurts are idea units, and their boundaries are marked by intonation, by pauses, and by syntax (Gere & Abbot, 1985). Open coding of each idea unit (Gere & Abbott, 1985) produced the following three emergent categories:

- A list of thirty-three functions of talk in conferences
- A picture of the patterns of talk in the conferences, and
- A description of how the talk of individuals co-mingled to produce new ideas.

During axial coding, five process categories emerged: procedures, idea generation, evaluation, interaction, and learning. Following are the categories and the functions of talk in each category. Note there is some overlap across categories.

Table 3.1 Categories and Functions of Talk

Procedures	Idea Generation	Evaluation	Interaction	Learning
Responses	Responses	Responses	Responses	Responses
Inform	Inform	Inform	Agreement	Definitions

Seeking help	Seeking help	Seeks opinions	Expression of feelings	Clarifications
Directions	Suggestions	Self-evaluation	Refocus talk	Teaching
	Explanations	Questions	Affirmations	Understanding
	Questions	Identify Problems	Off-Task talk	
	Examples	Opinions		
	Identify Problems	Challenges/counter challenges		
	Opinions	Clarifications		
	Challenges/Counter Challenges	Evaluate with explanations		
	Clarifications	Evaluate		
	Piggy back on previous idea	Self-advocacy		
	Thinking out loud	Support		
	Anecdotes			
	Restatements			
	Understanding			
	New ideas			
	Observations			

During selective coding three categories, idea generation, interactions, and learning were identified as representative of the type of talk that occurred in peer writing group first draft conferences.

The function-of-talk category *idea generation* detailed how knowledge was transmitted in a collaborative setting when students were working toward a shared goal. Learning was not dependent on deliberate instruction according to a set of reformulated objectives, but instead students contributed to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties. This category was consistent with Gutierrez's belief (1995) that "the acquisition of academic discourse is a socially mediated process" (p.22). In the writing groups when students were working together to improve a draft, they made observations, identified problems, gave suggestions that were often challenged and counter-challenged, and clarified their ideas and reasons with examples, anecdotes, opinions, and explanations. (This is also the pattern that the talk generally followed.)

The function of talk categories *interactions and learning* support Vygotsky's (1962) theory that learning is a socially mediated process. According to Wells (2000), Vygotsky was concerned with "the scope and rapidity of human development: How do humans, in their short life trajectories, advance so far beyond their initial biological

endowment and in such diverse directions?" (p. 53). To answer this question, Vygotsky saw it necessary to look not only at individuals but also at the social and material environment with which they interacted in the course of their development. From this perspective, who a person becomes is dependent on the activity systems he participates in and on the support and assistance he receives from other members of the community in appropriating the specific values, knowledge, and skills that are enacted in participation (Lave & Wanger, 1991). In the writing group conferences the students provided support and assistance to fellow group members. They provided support through affirmations ("Well, that was really good, and I liked how you did the pros and cons and how you elaborated a lot.") and verbalizations of agreement ("Mrs. McDonald would not want it. Yeah she would. Well, maybe."), and provided assistance through their responses to students seeking help ("Joe, is a machete a type of gun?" "No, a machete is a long knife.")

To examine more closely what the students were learning, I related during axial coding the function of talk subcategory *suggestions* to one of six specific subject matter categories listed and described in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Subject Matter Categories

Subject Matter Category	Description	Examples
Procedures and Processes	Idea units deal with group procedures	*Designating a scribe * Reviewing instructions
Content	Idea units refer to the content of the writing	"Tell me more about your first encounter with the dolphin."
Form	Idea units refer to the form of writing	"Did you include a lead?"
Mechanics	Idea units refer to capitalization, punctuation, grammatical, and spelling	"Add a period after that sentence" "That word is misspelled"
Reasons and	Idea units justify one's ideas	"Delete the sentence about

Explanations		sharks attacking people (content) because the focus of the paragraph is a shark's diet (reason)."
Responses	Idea units referring to previous utterances.	After a suggestion is given, the author may say, "What do you mean?"
Phatic Dimension	Idea units which do not fall into the specific focus categories	Off-task talk

From this pairing, I discovered that 76% of suggestions given were content related, 13% were form related, 10 % were mechanics related, and 1% were procedure related. This finding supports Dahl's (1988) finding that when the focus of the conference was revision, suggestions such as adding words that describe, moving or deleting information, working on clarity, and choosing among a variety of leads dominated the conversation.

Next, for each category, content, form, mechanics, and procedures, an analysis of each type of suggestion was performed. For example, content suggestions were broken down into: ideas, details, elaborations, additions and deletions of information, and vocabulary. After this analysis was complete, an analysis of how those suggestions influenced each type of essay was performed. Fifty-four percent of suggestions were acted upon in the informative essay and 49% were acted upon in the narrative essay. Usage percentages for each subject category and subcategories were obtained. The analysis was used to make comparisons between the two genres, informative and narrative, and to compare how talk influenced writing in each writing group. Through analysis of the student surveys and interviews, I looked at how the students thought about their writing and their collaborative participation in their writing group. Finally, I compared and contrasted the experiences of the students and writing groups and began to

form preliminary theories regarding the influence of talk about writing on the revision stage of writing.

Overview

The analyses of the various types of data provided an array of findings. The field notes, along with data from the student surveys, student interviews, and transcriptions provided descriptions of the roles each student played in their writing group, an assessment of academic abilities, and an explanation of how each student perceived the entire writing group experience. The transcriptions from the audio-tapes provided data to answer the question, how talk in peer writing conferences can be characterized. The data revealed six functions of talk (identification of problems, elaborations, suggestions, challenges, counter-challenges, and modifications of an original suggestion), several process patterns (confusions, interruptions, self-advocating, and evaluating), the form and content of the subject matter, assessments of what students learned, and descriptions of both long discussions and short exchanges. Analyses of written work and transcriptions revealed four types of suggestions (content, form, mechanics, and processes and procedures) and those suggestions often corresponded to instructional lessons. Quantitatively there was not a significant difference in the number of suggestions given for each genre. The specificity of a suggestion did influence the likelihood that a suggestion would be taken; detailed suggestions were more often acted upon than vague or global suggestions. The student surveys and student interviews data also indicated that the students were aware of suggestions they acted upon and suggestions they did not act upon and were able to justify their use of suggestions.

In Chapter Four—Findings One the findings address the question, how talk in peer writing conferences can be characterized. The data are organized by writing groups. For each group a rich description of each member is presented followed by a talk sample and an analysis of the talk. The talk samples were taken from one of the five peer conferences.

In Chapter Five---Findings Two the findings address the question, in what ways will peer conference suggestions influence writing? The analyses for the chapter occurred in four stages. In the first two stages, the data were drawn from the transcriptions of the peer writing conferences. In the first stage the data were drawn from each participant. In stage two, the six groups were compared. In stage three, the data were analyzed from the two student surveys, and in stage four, a comparison was done between data taken from the transcriptions and the student surveys.

Chapter Four: Findings One

The chapter is divided into two main sections: presentation of findings and question one findings. The format for the findings is explained in the presentation of findings section. This is followed by the findings for the question, how talk in peer writing conferences can be characterized.

Presentation of Findings

In the following section the data are organized by writing groups. For each group a description of group members is provided followed by a talk sample and an analysis of the talk sample. For each group member, the description includes the role the student played in the group and an assessment of academic abilities and/or writing proficiency. Distinctive student behaviors were described with anecdotal information or talk samples. A talk sample was taken from one of the five conferences. The sample represented the subject matter and process patterns of talk that were characteristic of the group, although not necessarily unique to just that group. The samples represent the three foci of the conferences, idea generation or brainstorming, suggestions for essay improvement (both content and form suggestions), and evaluation.

The analysis of talk focused on five main areas:

- Functions of talk patterns (i.e. identification of a problem, elaboration on problem, suggestion, challenge, counter challenge, modification of original suggestion)

- Descriptions of talk such as long discussions on a topic or short exchanges about multiple topics
- Process patterns like confusions, interruptions, self-advocating, and evaluating
- Subject matter (form and content)
- Assessments of what students learned

Question One Findings

How Can Talk in Peer Writing Conferences Be Characterized?

Introduction of Group Members: Casey, Tom, Kate, Ellen

Tom, Casey, Kate, and Ellen were in a fifth-grade advanced class. All four students were friendly and courteous, had excellent study skills, and could be termed "successful students." Casey was labeled Gifted and Talented and participated in an enrichment program one day a week; he excelled in both math and science. Casey was not an avid reader and struggled to meet writing deadlines. In both interviews, Casey stated that he did not make suggested changes because he did not have time although he readily admitted, "I don't really conserve my time that much." When asked to comment on his role in his writing group Casey responded, "I am either really into it or out of it due to headaches." His group labeled him the "suggestion giver" and the "peace-maker." One group member reported that "If we're arguing about a topic he [Casey] …usually stops us and tells us get all the ideas and put them all together and stuff like that." Casey liked working in his writing group, and the only problem he reported was that "Sometimes I am only trying to think of suggestions, and just as I'm about to say them,

he [Tom] has already said a whole lot about it." When asked if that frustrated him, he replied, "Not really because he has already said it, and it is the same. Kate, Ellen, and I share the same amount and then Tom shares a lot…but that is actually good because it's good that we have a leader."

Tom, the self-appointed leader, was an avid reader and proficient writer. He wanted to make good grades but wanted to earn his grade and, on several occasions, questioned the high rating he received from his group. For example, during the narrative rubric conference the group gave him an advanced on the category, "Precise Vocabulary." The following exchange occurred:

Tom: Where is the precise vocabulary?
Ellen: I don't know; it is just good…
Tom: But I don't have onomatopoeia, alliteration, or personification.
Ellen: I still think you have good vocabulary. I think some of those words I don't even know yet.
Tom: Like what? You don't know what dumb means? (laughter)…
Kate: I don't know what crimson means.

Tom repeatedly asked his group to give him suggestions. In the student interview Tom commented, "I'll give lots of suggestions and then I'll get one or two suggestions, and I'll ask if there are any more, and they all say there is nothing else so I'm always wondering if there was something else, and with the persuasive[1] essay I found out about the situations about trapping..." Although Tom really liked his group and felt that it helped him improve his writing, in his student interview he mentioned that a negative about groups is that students can come to depend on them too much.

[1] After the students completed the informative essays, they incorporated information from the essays into a PowerPoint presentation which they created to accompany their oral debate over a selected topic. Consequently, the students (and sometimes the teacher) interchanged the words informative and persuasive.

Kate was a student who did well in school because she received a lot of support at home. She liked school, but her main interests were playing the piano and dancing. She did reveal in the student interview that when she was on trips, she wrote stories, not to share but just for fun. Kate liked her writing group and needed it because at times she became lost in the details of her ideas and did not see the big picture. For example, when she wrote her informative essay (a letter addressed to her parents) about ferrets, she only presented the positive aspects of owning a ferret; the instructions stated to present both sides of an issue. She justified the omission by stating, "It's kinda like that because you want your parents to get it [ferret] for you …and you don't want them to hear the bad things about it so they won't do it for you." In her narrative, Kate's lead was about two girls being chased by a pack of wolves; the lead had no connection to her plot which was about her best friend being kidnapped. When a group member questioned the connection she stated, "It's kind of like a foreshadowing the next day and what is happening after." When another group member again challenged her and repeated that the lead had nothing to do with the next day, she responded, "Well, it's not the same thing but it's kinda like a scary nightmare and then something is really happening; something different is happening but not the same thing." Kate acted upon six of the nine documented suggestions she received from the group and reported that her feelings were never hurt. She never hesitated to ask group members to define words she did not know or to praise the work of others. In the narrative rubric conference she contributed seven of the fifteen affirmations given to various group members.

Ellen had moved to Texas at the beginning of fifth grade and became a writer. She stated, "I wasn't into poetry until now. In fourth grade writing wasn't a big priority and

then this year I started writing in a journal and writing poetry and stuff." Ellen was an excellent student with a big heart. According to her, the role she played in the writing group was "to mostly help Kate, like, with her writing and sometimes with her poems and stuff. I help Kate out a lot, and I'm good at finding grammar mistakes and spelling mistakes." Ellen not only helped Kate, but she also advocated for her during conferences. For example, during the narrative first draft conference the following exchange took place:

Tom: It was a good story, but I just didn't get where the suspense was. (referring to Kate's story.)
Casey: I wasn't really scared at all.
Ellen: Oh look, "Ahh, she shocked us; we were dead. Five minutes later we were sleeping in our beds perfectly fine." You want to read on, don't you?
Tom: No, they were sleeping. It was a dream.
Ellen: Ok, look this is the note the guy left. When he passed by me he dropped a note and it said, "I know where your friend Mercy is." That is suspenseful.

Ellen enjoyed working with her writing group and benefited from the experience. On her writing survey, she wrote, "My writing is improving from my group, like, sometimes in my writing they [group members] give me an awesome suggestion I would of never thought of. They've really helped me think out of the box. My writing is getting more creative everyday because of them."

Talk from Narrative First Draft Conference on April 30, 2004

Ellen's narrative essay, *The Unfortunate*, was the focus of this conversation. The story was about the demise of a fifth-grade baseball player by the ghost of a baseball player who was killed in a batting accident. The story was well written, but Ellen formatted the 42 line plot into seven chapters; the chapter divisions were not all at logical

breaks in the story, and therefore, added confusion to the flow of the story. For example, Ellen ended chapter two with the following event… "I got to the field. An eerie mist was rising. I crept into the dugout. I saw a figure on the bench. I got closer. It was a cracked bat. Blood stains were on it." Chapter Three began, "I was in shock. Did the ghost hurt someone? Then I saw her…" The chapter insertion caused the natural flow of events to be interrupted. Casey picked up on the problem and immediately labeled it as a transition problem but never identified that the chapter divisions contributed to the problem. Note that the content of the story was used to illustrate the various viewpoints.

Table 4.1 Narrative First Draft Conference Talk: Casey, Tom, Ellen, Kate

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Casey	I have one thing. Your transitions are not that great.	Form	Identifies problem
2	Ellen	What is that supposed to mean?	Response	Seeks clarification
3	Casey	Like you would say and then and then you saw the ghost and then you would go onto another chapter and say	Content	Explanation
4	Ellen	It is suspense	Reasons and Explanations	Justification
5	Kate	You want to know what is going to happen next.	Reasons and Explanation	Supporting idea
6	Casey	Yeah, but then you don't say what is going to happen next… She just says like you saw the ghost.	Reasons and Explanation	Challenge
7	Ellen	Oh my gosh look, that night, wait, The Ghost of Chelsea Port. Chelsea was the most famous softball player. That is telling. [The last sentence of the first paragraph was, "I think it's the ghost, the ghost of Chelsea Corpse. The first sentence of the next paragraph was, "Chelsea was the most famous softball player in history."]	Reasons and Explanations	Justification with example
8	Casey	That is a good transition. But listen to this. I got	Reasons and explanation/form	Affirmation/Challenge with example

		closer. It was a cracked bat. Blood stains were on it [end of chapter 2]. I was in shock [first sentence in chapter 3].		
9	Kate	Oh wait, did the ghost hurt somebody? That would make it scary.	Content	Seeks clarification …remark does not refer to transition discussion
10	Casey	Listen to this. Listen to this. I got into my room. The ghost slit my hand and hit me with a bat. I blacked out. I heard my sister scream…	Reasons and Explanations	Example of problem
11	Ellen	When I awoke. I awoke. I got it already.	Reasons and Explanations	Verbal correction/understanding
12	Casey	Just listen to this. I had to do something fast. That was a good one though. [referring to previous transition]. Then we saw her. Unfortunately she saw us too. I got I got pickle juice.	Reasons and explanations/form	Example of problem and affirmation
13	Ellen	Well, I couldn't think of anything else to get rid of the ghosts.	Reasons and explanations/ Content	Justification
14	Casey	Yeah, that transition is really bad. We ran. Fortunately that time we got away.	Reasons and explanations	Opinion and suggestion
15	Ellen	That would be giving away the rest of the story.	Reasons and explanations	Challenge
16	Casey	No, I said, "We ran; luckily that time we got away. The next day I grabbed some pickle juice." Or something like that.	Reasons and explanations	Elaborated suggestion
17	Ellen	No, that is stupid. Well then I have	Reasons and explanations	Challenge
18	Tom	Laughter	Phatic Dimension	Tension breaker
19	Casey	If it is stupid to you, don't do it.	Reasons and Explanations	Counter-challenge
20	Ellen	Well, how do you kill ghosts? What did I do? Call Ghostbusters?	Content	Inquiry
21	Casey	No, I'm not talking about how bad the pickle juice idea was. That was pretty good. But listen to this. You are reading the story and the story said, "We got to the field. Then we saw her. Unfortunately she saw	Content/Reasons and explanations	Clarification/Affirmation/ Example/Affirmation/Explanation of problem.

		us too." That part is good. And then I grabbed the pickle juice in my pocket.		
22	Ellen	To kill her	Reasons and explanations	Clarification
23	Casey	I thought you said I grabbed the pickle juice off the counter.	Reasons and explanations	Clarification
24	All	Laughter	Phatic dimension	Tension Release
25	Ellen	…as anyone knows, pickle juice is…	Content	Inform
26	Casey	That part is good. Never mind…	Reasons and explanations	Affirmation/Dismissal
27	Tom	Can I give a suggestion?	Procedures and Processes	Procedures and processes

Analysis of Talk

Content Characteristics

During both first draft conferences, informative and narrative, the group gave 24 content related suggestions, five form related suggestions, and three mechanical-error suggestions. In the talk sample the students solved a form related problem, transitions. The sample illustrates the usual conversation pattern. One member located a problem (Line 1) and explained the problem using examples from the text (Lines 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 21); a suggestion to correct the problem was offered (Line 16). The problem and suggestions were challenged and counter-challenged by the group's members (Lines 4, 5, 7, 13, 15, and 17). Ultimately learning from the discussion occurred (Line11). For example, Ellen learned that a transition was needed between the action of blacking out and hearing the sister scream. The entire group learned that transitions in writing can be either an action or an explanation. The discussion reinforced a whole-group mini-lesson on transitions that had occurred during the narrative essay and provided the opportunity for the students to engage the topic on an application level.

Process Characteristics

Three process patterns of talk were characteristic of this group:

- Confusions
- Interspersed comments
- Positive interactions

Confusions often occurred (possibly because each student did not have a copy of the essay but had to depend on their listening skills) as was evidenced by the conversation in lines 12 through 26. Ellen thought Casey was referring to a content problem, the "pickle juice" idea, when he was actually still referring to a form problem, transitions. The confusion came because he thought he heard that the pickle juice was on the counter. When students were confused, they engaged in a question-answer volley until the confusion was resolved.

Another characteristic of the talk in this group was that there were often unrelated statements interspersed between the flow of ideas on a topic. For example, on Line 9, "Oh wait, did the ghost hurt somebody? That would make it scary," Casey and Ellen were discussing transitions and Kate, probably thinking aloud, threw in this comment. Note that no one responded to Kate's remark.

Finally, the group interaction was positive. Group members affirmed the work of other members as they delivered suggestions, and the group members frequently gave supportive comments to help a group member defend his or her opinion. Humorous comments resulted in laughter, and there was no evidence of jealousy or animosity among the members. Note in the example that Tom just listened to this conversation until the last line. All group members participated in each conference but not necessarily

in each debate. Overall, this group was one of the most effective groups in terms of exploring ideas and giving suggestions.

Introduction of Group Members: Susan, Lee, Brad, and George

Susan, Lee, Brad, and George are regular-education students in a fifth-grade inclusion class. Lee described her role in the group during a student interview: "Well, not at the top and not at the bottom, but in the very middle…because I tell what is wrong [or] if you need to add something." She explained that Brad and Susan were at the top because they had more writing experience and gave more suggestions, and she and George were in the middle; George was in the middle because "he has good writing; it is always about the army. He knows something about the army so you are going to know it. We learn something everyday so. I don't think anyone is really at the bottom." (This reasoning was very typical for Lee. She often saw situations and suggestions in a positive light.) Lee was proud that her mother was from Thailand and wanted her to be proud of her school work. Neatness was extremely important to her mother, and consequently, Lee had beautiful handwriting and often focused more on the appearance of her work than on the content.

Susan was the unofficial leader of the group. She controlled the flow of activity, refocused the group when a member was off task, and was a stickler for mechanics. Susan reported in a student interview that "at the beginning of the year I wasn't that good [at writing] because last year when we were doing writing I didn't do that well. I just forgot a lot of words like the, and, of…Now I usually go over it, and I find stuff, and last year I couldn't find anything when I went over it." She attributed this improvement to

her group. She stated, “It helped that I looked over group members’ [papers] because it gave me ideas and stuff I shouldn’t do.”

George was labeled a “bubble” student which meant he was in danger of failing the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) test based on his previous benchmark and standardized test scores. He received special tutoring for math and reading. George stated that he wanted to be in a group next year because he felt that the group helped him improve his grade. He saw himself as a listener in the group and recognized that he did not give as many suggestions as other group members because “I don’t look as fast as they do. They can see it [a problem] right away and I don’t.” George did not hesitate to seek help from the group. He asked group members to define technical terms such as mechanics, and he asked them to help him with ideas for his narrative ending. He also did not hesitate to contribute when he could. When the group was brainstorming a title for a narrative essay, for example, the following exchange occurred:

Susan: How about “A Bad Night to Be Alive?”
Lee: Well, that was a good one, but
Brad: Maybe we can call it since
Lee: Since someone disappears
George: Yeah, “The Disappearance”

Brad was the “think tank” for the group. He was the group member who could recognize small discrepancies. For example, he suggested that Lee change her lead in her informative essay from “Hut, hut, hut” to something that would be less sport specific since she was talking about several sports, not just football. But although Brad was a prolific narrative writer (he wrote and shared with the class numerous action stories with guinea pigs as the main characters), he lacked the behavioral and organizational skills to

write an in-depth informative essay. Brad got sidetracked while doing research and needed close supervision while he was on the computer. He also lost his research cards and as a result wrote a ten sentence, three-ideas, informative essay as opposed to a fifty sentence narrative filled with figurative language, a multi-scene setting, (an atypical form for a fifth-grade writer), and a plot packed with twists and turns. (I don't think his writing improved that greatly over a two month span.)

One of the defining characteristics of the group was that they had a good grasp of the quality of their writing. Student essays were assigned two grades, one from their writing group and one from the teacher. Following are the narrative essay grades:

Table 4.2 Narrative Essay Grades

Name	Group Grade	Teacher Grade
George	89	86
Brad	87	90
Lee	84	81
Susan	86	88

The second defining characteristic of this group was that they worked very well together. Lee expressed this idea stating, "We don't fight and if they [group members] give us a bad grade we'll say, 'Oh, we need to work on that.' We don't say, 'You need to raise my grade higher just because …I did good.' It's not what I think but what the group thinks."

Talk from Informative First Draft Conference on February 5, 2004

Lee's essay, *Should Girls Play Football,* was the focus of the talk. The essay begins with a description of girls who do not like cheerleading but do like getting down and dirty. It then jumps to the statement that when girls do make a team they are kicked off. One example is given followed by a quote by Abigail Adams advocating for

women's rights and ends with the sentence that girls should have a choice to play sports. The essay makes one point, describes only one side of the issue, and is written all in one paragraph, but it sparked 136 idea units compared to a total of forty-nine idea units for the other three group members combined! The focus of the talk was initially on the usage of the word rebellion in Adams' quote. Then the conversation shifted to the debate the essay alludes to, should girls play football. Eventually the talk included all sports and that is when Brad offered his suggestion about separating ideas on each sport into separate paragraphs. This scenario, where suggestions centered on talk and not on the essay, was not uncommon. The student conversations were often much richer and more extensive than the actual essay. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, Lee readily agreed to the paragraph suggestion, but in the end her essay only contained very sketchy information. The reason this sample of talk was cited then was to illustrate how the group worked together to rework a suggestion until all group members were content. Especially characteristic of this group was their willingness to compromise.

Table 4.3 Informative First Draft Conference Talk: Lee, Susan, Brad, George

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Lee	Reads essay	Content	Inform
2	Brad	Maybe you should put it up in sections. Like one paragraph football, one paragraph hockey, and then the last paragraph why girls should have a choice.	Form	Suggestion
3	George	I think why girls should have a choice.	Content	Opinion
4	Susan	That would be about six pages	Form	Challenge
5	Brad	Oh be quiet. You never take my suggestions, will ya?	Responses	Counter with Expression of feelings
6	Susan	No, but she is mainly saying about football.	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation
7	Lee	No, no, no, hold on, hold on, maybe I should take a little of Brad's choice but change it a little	Reasons and Explanations	Compromise
8	George	You said…(not understandable on tape)	Response	Restatement
9	Susan	OK, you do one paragraph of football, and then you do another paragraph of hockey. And then do one paragraph of all the sports together.	Form	Modifying suggestion
10	Lee	Yeah, like	Response	Agreement
11	Brad	No, no, no. I got it. Maybe you should shorten it. One paragraph football. One paragraph hockey and baseball, and then the last paragraph.	Form	Modifying original suggestion

12	Susan	Let's take out one paragraph, ok? Let's take out why girls.	Content	Suggestion with example
13	Lee	It can be two paragraphs.	Form	Inform
14	Susan	Ok, listen, one [paragraph] about the wants	Form	Clarification
15	Brad	Hockey	Content	Example
16	George	What girls want	Content	Restate
17	Susan	Another one all about Abigail Adams	Content	Suggestion
18	George	History, the history of football. See if girls really did play football.	Content	Suggestion
19	Brad	Yeah go to soccer.	Content	Suggestion
20	George	Say football in America	Content	Challenge
21	Brad	I went to Primrose, and I had this teacher named Michelle and she played football and she got knocked out and thought it was Christmas.	Content	Example
22	All	Giggles	Response	Expression of feelings
23	Susan	Yeah, I think that is a good idea of what you should do. I think it is George's turn.	Response Procedures and Processes	Affirmation Procedural direction

Analysis of Talk

Process Characteristics

This group prided itself in its ability to work together and accept suggestions, and one reason they were successful was because they worked together to create the final suggestion. In line 2 Brad brought up the idea of dividing the information into paragraphs. Susan challenged him (Line 4) with the statement that the essay would be about six pages. Brad counter-challenged (Line 5) and immediately in line 6, Lee, the optimist, proposed a compromise, "I should take a little of Brad's choice but change it a little." In line 9, Susan, took her cue from Lee and proposed a modification of the original suggestion. After Lee gave an affirmative nod, "yeah," (Line 10), Brad, undaunted by the suggested modification, modified his own suggestion. The students were flexible enough with their ideas that modifying a suggestion did not present a problem.

Content Characteristics

During the informative and narrative conferences, the group gave ten mechanical-error suggestions, nineteen content suggestions, four form suggestions, and one organizational tip. The talk generally followed the following pattern: One member would locate a problem (L2) and then the group members would follow up with suggestions (L2), opinions (L3), explanations (L6), expression of feelings (L5), clarifications (L14)…

Suggestions offered in this group tended to be concrete, drawn from personal experience, or personal opinions. The focus of this segment of talk, for example, was on a very concrete aspect of writing, adding paragraphs. When the students gave content suggestions during conferences, the suggestions were generally concrete such as "state the time the story took place," "add an onomatopoeia," "add a sport," or "replace the word *rebellion*." If the suggestions were not concrete, they were drawn from the students' personal experiences (we have a cafeteria; we don't have any lunch tables outside) or were personal opinions (if a dog is put on a diet, he would become more playful). Even when suggestions were framed in categorical terms, the supporting examples given were generally personal opinions. Example:

Susan: You should put why you want your dog on a diet.
George: It would be better for the dog; it won't be fun playing with him if he is fat.

By contrast, when Tom, Ellen, Kate, and Casey's group gave content suggestions framed in categorical terms, the follow-up examples were specific details or facts.

Tom: You need to put more bad stuff about them [ferrets]. And the whole time you just put that you need one.
Kate: Oh, they scratch you.

In summary, this group was one of the most effective groups in terms of working together to modify suggestions, but generally their suggestions were either concrete or drawn from personal experience as opposed to suggestions framed in categorical terms.

Introduction of Group Members: Russ, Michael, Jeff, Peter

Russ, Michael, Jeff, and Peter were students in a fifth-grade inclusion class. This group could be characterized as a researcher's dream come true and a teacher's worst nightmare. They were the only same gender group in the study and although they enjoyed (at times) working together, they all agreed in the final student interview that it would have been better if their group had been a mixture of both boys and girls. Specifically they mentioned that their group would have performed better if Jill, a student known as a task master, had been in the group. One group member, Michael, also stated emphatically that "they [girls] are better at catching mechanics and we [boys] are better at words." The group was the only group that required a troubleshooting conference; the conference took place before the boys began the narrative rubric conference. A snippet from the transcription of the conference depicts the problem:

> Mrs. Bedard: One of the things that makes groups really good at working together effectively is that they always have nice positive comments [for the other group members]. That doesn't include saying "stupid" or "that's the worst thing I have ever seen," or "just redo the whole thing." You have to remember, to me, if you have improved a little something on each paper, I am pleased. When you come to conference with me, I don't sit there and mark everything on your paper, and I

> don't say "That's bad; This is horrible; You stink." I try to pick one thing [to comment on].

Although it appears that the problem in the group was the result of its members being all the same gender, another contributing factor could have been the make-up of the group. Russ was an ESL (English as a Second Language) student. Jeff had attention deficit issues and was a 504 student (Section 504 is a civil rights law that ensures that children with disabilities have equal access to an education; the children may receive accommodations and modifications). Peter was dyslexic and received daily services from a Reading Specialist. All other groups were composed of either all regular education students or a combination of regular education and gifted and talented students.

Russ had come to the United States from Russia. He had been in the states for approximately one year so his English language skills were still developing. He was a very social student and would entertain his group at the end of each conference with a song. Outwardly it appeared that he enjoyed the camaraderie of his group, but inwardly Russ was very sensitive to any suggestions and especially to any reference to incorrect usage of the English language. This sensitivity became apparent during an editing conference when he physically attacked a member of his writing group for correcting his work. After the incident, Russ had the opportunity either to change groups or work alone; he chose to remain with his group.

Jeff was a very bright and honest young man who recognized his limitations. When asked in a student interview what role he played in his writing group, he replied, "I play 'not finished the writing' [role]." Jeff wanted to be finished and stated, "I think I just need to stay on task and just get it all done," but in reality maintaining attention for

any length of time was very difficult for Jeff. He credited two members of his group for trying to keep him focused, which he liked, because he said, "I do like writing; I mean I think it is fun to just put out your ideas on just anything you really want to…" Jeff loved discussing his ideas although he had trouble expressing himself verbally; it took him a long time to formulate his ideas and he repeated words when he was talking. For example, when he was asked which informative conference was most beneficial to him and why, he responded:

> Probably the brainstorming. I mean there was. I mean I had to skip from different things because I was wanting to do like no bullies policy and then and then, I mean, I was having trouble with that so I had to go to motorcycle safety, and then I had some trouble with that so I almost went to motorcycle laws. I just went to a bunch of different things.

Jeff's verbal hesitancy often prohibited him from communicating his viewpoints to the group. Following is a stretch of talk that illustrates this point:

(Jeff began his scary story with the sentence; this is my dream, my worst dream.)

Michael:	It's [story] not scary. It's a dream. Well, say it is not a dream. Take out the beginning.
Jeff:	Wait, wait,
Michael:	Let me read it.
Jeff:	Wait
Russ:	Let Jeff say something.
Michael:	You are giving away all at the beginning of the story.
Jeff:	It's not though. It really isn't. Trust me.
Michael:	…and I'm telling you right now it is my dream.
Jeff:	Listen, listen
Russ:	Guys, just listen to him. Let him say.
Jeff:	But I woke up in the middle of the night and I was scared to go into the garage. [I am assuming he is referring to a time in his own life.] I did not want to and I want that feeling to happen. I want them to know that it felt real.

Jeff was not able to think and verbalize fast enough to get his point across. Russ sensed his problem and twice admonished the group to listen to Jeff and give him time. Unfortunately, when Jeff was finally able to give an explanation, it was not complete enough to make sense to the group. He was trying to describe a feeling but had not worked out how to put the idea into words. Frequently, Jeff expected his readers to draw inferences from very sketchy material. Jeff also had difficulty writing; it took him a long time to print his words. (Jeff was also a very slow typist. Many times his work was typed for him.) This difficulty and his poor organizational skills (he continually lost drafts), hindered his efforts to bring an essay to completion by the deadline date.

Peter had moved to Lake Elementary at the beginning of the school year. He had difficulty making friends because of his racial prejudices and critical assessments of people and events. Often Peter was unaware of how hurtful his remarks were to others because he often made critical remarks about himself as well. For example, during a student interview, the following exchange took place:

Mrs. B: What do you think of your writing group?
Peter: Good, but Jeff needs to be a little faster though.
Mrs. B: But everyone is different.
Peter: Yep, on the goped (referring to the informative essay) I was really slow and Jeff was really fast, so

Peter's writing was very basic. Fluency and sequencing of ideas were major problems. Peter had difficulty understanding the structure of a paragraph, and most of his writing consisted of single facts with no elaboration. Peter's main concern was to complete assignments quickly. The idea of slowing down and putting more effort into an assignment was not a priority for him. Therefore, the writing group was very beneficial

for him because it forced him to work at a slower pace than usual. He had to be patient and listen to what others said. He rarely made long remarks; his comments were usually short and choppy such as "Ok, if you want it to be scary," "Who's John?" "He's your best friend but" "I said a pent or big house." All of his statements were made in a fast, rushed manner. Rarely did he give a suggestion and elaborate it all at once. His ideas came in spurts.

Michael was a very intelligent, organized, and caring student. On the day that Russ became upset during the editing conference, he and Peter went into the classroom during their recess period to reprint their essays (because Russ had torn their essays into pieces), but they also reprinted Russ's essay because they did not want Russ not to have his paper ready to share the next day. When I asked the boys during individual student interviews why they had taken the initiative to complete Russ's paper, Peter responded, "Because we wanted to get a good group grade." Michael responded, "Well, because I didn't want him to come here [school] having work to do. And, like, us just sitting back and watching him do it. I felt like I'd do his paper." A concern that I had during the school year was that Michael, because of the wide disparity between his writing ability and the abilities of the other group members, would feel that he was not benefiting from the group experience. But when I asked him to comment on any aspect of the writing program he said, "I will say something about the writing group. I like [it] because last year I uh wrote things that weren't very active in the story, and my writing group has told me to, like, add words to make it more exciting." He was pleased with his roles of editor-in- chief, suggestion giver, and group leader and especially enjoyed participating in issue discussions.

Talk from Informative First Draft Conference on February 5, 2004

This conversation took place during a first draft conference. The purpose of the conference was to offer suggestions to improve the first draft, but on the scheduled conference date Jeff had not written his first draft. Therefore, the focus of the conference was idea generation. (After he participated in the conference, he was sent to Content Mastery where he received one-on-one assistance. The next day, another first draft conference was held; Jeff read his draft and the only suggestion given was for Jeff to find research to PROVE that motorcycles are safer. Peter offered his assistance.) The significance of this talk sample is that it illustrates what this group did best, explore ideas.

Table 4.4 Informative First Draft Conference Talk: Jeff, Russ, Michael, Peter

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Jeff	I think I think that motorcycles are safer because they if you got in a head on collision the the engine. Your engine could, your engine could land up on your lap or slicing you in half.	Content/Reasons and explanations	Opinion justified with example
2	Peter	One problem like a hot dog. Sound	Phatic Dimension	Humor
3	Russ	My legs are running away, come back.	Phatic Dimension	Humor
4	Peter	No, because the wheels would go like that like in a Toyota	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
5	Russ	But what if you have a crash in a car and you can't get out and because a car is much bigger, much bigger	Reasons and Explanations	Counter challenge
6	Peter	You can get encaved [enclosed]	Reasons and Explanations	Supporting previous comment
7	Russ	In a motorcycle you just spun out like on the grass on the side of the road.	Reasons and Explanation	Explanation
8	Jeff	Wait, wait, the majority of people say no because you can they think get hurt more on a motorcycle but still	Reasons and Explanation	Explanation
9	Russ	What if you wear helmet and other stuff?	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
10	Jeff	And leather and leather jacket and stuff like that	Reasons and Explanations	Adding to previous comment
11	Michael	A leather jacket won't protect you from anything.	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
12	Russ	Oh yes it does.	Response	Counter-challenge
13	Jeff	Yes it does.	Response	Counter-challenge
14	Michael	You will have a dislocated elbow	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation/example
15	Peter	Ok, wait	Procedures and processes	Stop talk, provide think time.
16	Jeff	You can still get cut but it helps a lot.	Reasons and Explanations	Compromise
17	Michael	How does it help?	Response	Seeking clarification
18	Jeff	Because the friction is not as bad as it would be on the regular street because it would tear it [jacket] would tear the tissue	Reasons and explanations	Explanation
19	Peter	Ok, wait a second. Oh, um	Procedures and Processes	Stop talk, provide think time.
20	Michael	So you are saying that it would tear more the leather jacket than the tissue.	Reasons and Explanations	Clarification
21	Jeff	Yeah, and leather pants and	Reasons and	Elaboration of previous

			Explanations	idea
22	Peter	And if you wear a helmet and leather pants and a face mask and	Reasons and Explanations	Adding examples to previous idea
23	Russ	They have lots of supplies	Reasons and Explanations	Adding to previous idea
24	Peter	Try 35 miles per hour head on crash, that's what they always say, 35 miles an hour	Content	New idea
25	Jeff	What about 100 miles an hour?	Content	Challenge
26	Peter	Try 35 mile an hour crash. That's what they usually are in a Toyota Camry, no the new Toyota	Content	Restate previous idea and elaborate it.
27	Russ	It doesn't matter	Response	Opinion
28	Peter	SUV and try a motorcycle. Who do you think? Say an 18 wheeler versus…No, a suburban versus a motorcycle. Who do you think would win?	Content	New idea
29	Michael	A suburban	Response	Response
30	Russ	A suburban but he would get hurt	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
31	Michael	If you got hit in a head on collision, the suburban would crush in the glass, crush the person, kill the person, and (referring to person on the motorcycle)	Reasons and Explanations	Counter challenge
32	Jeff	And the metal would	Reasons and Explanations	Counter challenge
33	Peter	I have been on a head on collision dude; I have been on a head on collision. The car we hit smack in the middle and everybody was ok, but since we the Dodge Durango	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation---anecdote
34	Jeff	But if you have a motorcycle, the problem is you won't get hurt as bad because you won't be crushed inside of it.	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
35	Peter	No you won't but	Response	Response
36	Jeff	Being inside of something is the worst because it can blow up.	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation
37	Peter	If you get rear-ended and hit in the	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
38	Michael	You won't fly in the middle of the road	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
39	Jeff	Sparks from the car can fly up and hit the gas tank and blow up.	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation of previous idea
40	Russ	Dude, listen to me. If you get rear-ended the car can't blow up.	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
41	Peter	Yeah it can	Response	Counter Challenge
42	Michael	Jeff, if you fly out in the middle of the road, you get run over by a car. Head on collision with the car you would be in the back seat just with a crushed car. You won't be with a crushed skull, a crushed scapula, a crushed rib…	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
43	Peter	You will be crushed EVERYWHERE!	Reasons and Explanations	Adding support to previous comment
44	Michael	You won't be flying everywhere like you are on road like when you fly off a motorcycle.	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
45	Jeff	Somebody has to be driving it.	Response	Counter challenge
46	Peter	I bet in a head on collision um 35 miles per hour on a Harley Davidson um, both of them would die	Content	New idea
47	Jeff	Maybe not both of them would die. The majority of the people would be the Suburban mainly because it is a lot bigger.	Reason and Explanation	Challenge

Analysis of Talk

The most notable characteristics of this group were:

Content Characteristics

- Long discussions or debates on issues; talk was filled with new ideas, challenges, and counter-challenges
- Limited sides of an issue or perspectives were pointed out

Russ, Jeff, Peter, and Michael enjoyed debating issues. Their conferences were lengthy; in this sample, which is 47 of 92 unit ideas, about the issue of motorcycles being safer than cars, there were two off-task remarks (phatic dimension), twenty-nine reasons/explanations, nine responses, two procedures and processes, and six content unit ideas. (One response was coded as both a reason/explanation and content.) Functions of talk were coded as: three new ideas, twelve challenges, eight counter-challenges, seven explanations, and six elaborations of a previous idea.

During this conversation many scenarios were presented with specific details and contributing factors like speed and type of vehicle were mentioned but not actually taken into account. No one considered that if a motorcycle hit a suburban's passenger door going thirty-five miles per hour, the probability that the suburban's gas tank would still be intact would be pretty high. That type of higher level reasoning, where criteria or characteristics such as speed and location of impact are used to rate ideas as more influential or less influential than others, was not evidenced.

Process Characteristics

- Ideas were given in spurts. For example, one idea would be presented and then several lines later the elaboration or explanation of the idea would be given
- Ideas were presented and then added to by following speakers

It could be said of this group that they were "thinking on their feet." Many of their verbalizations were thoughts in progress. This pattern can be seen beginning with line 36. Jeff stated, "Being inside of something (vehicle) is the worst because it can blow up." He finished the idea in line 39 when he stated, "Sparks from the car can fly up and hit the gas tank and blow up." Another consistent pattern with this group was that one group member would present an idea and then other group members piggybacked, modified, or added information to the original idea. In line 9, Russ asked, "What if you wear helmet and other stuff?" In line 10, Jeff added, "And leather and leather jacket and stuff like that." In line 24, Peter introduced a new scenario, "Try 35 miles per hour head on crash. That's what they always say, 35 miles an hour." Jeff modified the scenario by asking, "What about 100 miles an hour?" In line 20, Michael was seeking a clarification when he stated, "So you are saying that it (accident) would tear more the leather jacket than the tissue (human tissue)." In line 21 Jeff responded with an elaboration of his previous idea, "Yeah, and leather pants and…" In line 22, Peter piggybacked on the idea and added, "And if you wear a helmet and leather pants and a face mask and…"

One final note on this sample was the absence of brusque remarks. Brusque remarks like: "That is your lead. I don't like the start" and "This is the bad [worst] thing I have ever seen you write" were characteristic of this group. Although there were no stated affirmations, such as "that is a good point," the boys worked well together by adding support or examples to an idea. Unlike this transcript, brusque remarks were evidenced during first draft conferences when the boys were giving suggestions or during rubric conferences. Interestingly, the trouble-shooting conference, which was held mainly because of the fear that Russ would have another outburst as he had during the

informative essay editing conference, totally stopped all brusque remarks from everybody except from Russ. Reflecting on the situation, I wondered if Russ's limited experience with the English language caused him not to realize the offensiveness of some of his remarks. For example, one brusque remark was: "I don't know, and I don't care." The remark sounds very much like something a teenage character would say on a television sitcom. Could it be that Russ was just trying to act cool? (It should be noted that Russ was a year older than all of the other students in the class.) Two other brusque remarks, "Ok, I don't like your title. It doesn't make sense" and "Really bad" were direct but were not attacking the writer personally.

Table 4.5 Tally of Brusque Remarks:

Name	Persuasive First Draft	Persuasive Rubric	Narrative First Draft	Narrative Rubric	Total
Russ	3	3	9	2	17
Jeff	2	1	6	0	9
Peter	2	3	3	0	8
Michael	2	0	0	0	2

Introduction of Group Members: Jill, Kyle, Carl, Alice

Jill, Kyle, Carl, and Alice were members of a fifth-grade inclusion class; none of the group members had special labels or needs. They were all honor-roll students and participated in extra-curricular activities such as the chess club and U.I.L events. Although they enjoyed working together, they were not best friends and did not socialize with each other outside of the classroom.

Jill had high expectations for herself and for others. In a student interview Jill expressed her frustration with her writing group. She said, "Some people in my group do nothing and are off topic a lot; they come totally unprepared." Her role in her group was the task master, a role she enjoyed although she would have preferred if there had not

been a need for such a role. Her group was glad she played that role and a fellow group member, Carl, stated in an interview, "It [Jill's reminders to stay focused] was funny." Although Jill was sometimes frustrated with her group, she readily stated that none of the four conferences were a waste of time: "I got suggestions from all of them. They [group members] help me with ideas like you should exaggerate, and they see punctuation marks [errors] that I don't see." Jill indeed needed help with her writing because although she enjoyed writing and wrote often, when she came to fifth-grade, her writing had major sequencing problems, and her ideas did not flow; grammatical and punctuation errors further compounded the problem.

Kyle was a very articulate student with a gift for understanding quickly both content and processes. After completing a series of Talk Lessons taken from Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif's (2000) book, *Thinking Together*, Kyle highlighted a very important understanding, writing, "At the beginning of the year one person would say something, and the rest of the people hid their ideas so we wrote whatever came first. Everybody also just said something, but it was never discussed or disagreed with. Now we give reasons for what we say and discuss everything and share all ideas."

Interestingly, Kyle had problems accepting ideas from his group members. He readily accepted editing suggestions but was defensive about idea suggestions. For example, he wrote his informative essay on assigned lunchroom seating. During the first draft conference, the following exchange took place:

Jill: You should put in your story about table washers somewhere.
Kyle: Why? It is not about table washers.
Alice: Yeah, I think you should.
Jill: Because it is important as a con.
Alice: We need this because we need to know who is going to be the table

washers if we switch tables.

Kyle: It is not about who is going to be table washers. It is about why we should be able to sit. Not how.

Jill: But you have to do cons and still the con is table washers. You can't leave the tables messy.

Alice: We can't leave tables messy because it is our responsibility to clean the tables especially since we are 5th graders.

Kyle: But that is not my thing. That is a whole different thing.

Carl: Just because she suggests it doesn't mean you have to put it in.

Kyle: The second step is arranging how we are going to do it.

Jill: It's a con

Alice: Yeah, you need to put it in there.

Kyle: I don't choose the cons. Russ did the con. Not me.

Kyle was either unable to comprehend the logic behind using the problem of having to reorganize the current table washer system as a con or unwilling to consider the suggestion. He had it in his mind that the issue of table washers was not part of his essay and was not flexible enough in his thinking or attitude to consider another option that didn't fit into his schema. The last line of the example, "I don't choose the cons. Russ did the con. Not me." was a very revealing remark. It was characteristic of Kyle to blame others for mistakes or not to take responsibility for his own actions. He argued frequently with authority figures and often would pout when he did not get his way.

Carl was the type of student who marches to the beat of his own drummer. When asked to describe his writing process, he commented, "Well, first I kind of daydream about a topic, and then I just try to learn about it, and then write about it." Carl was very bright, and he was one of the few students who researched a topic to learn and not just to find facts for the essay. Consequently, he often took longer to complete his writing and did not always meet writing deadlines. This behavior was compounded by his poor organizational skills. (According to Carl his first draft was washed, and then another student unknowingly carried away his second draft.) But despite the fact that he was

rarely prepared for a conference, he contributed to his writing group in two ways. First, Carl could be labeled a peace maker, but the label fit only because he understood that the purpose of the conferences was to help improve writing, not to have your ideas used. Carl reminded his group of this fact on several occasions. In line ten of the above example Carl states, "Just because she suggests it doesn't mean you have to put it in." Earlier in the conference when the students were discussing Jill's essay on D.A.R.E., group member, Alice, commented, "I think we should do D.A.R.E." Carl responded, "It [this conference] is how to make her paper better [not about your opinion]." Secondly, Carl gave excellent suggestions because he was a very methodical, detailed thinker. For example, in the narrative conference the following exchange occurred:

Alice: She heard the door open and close.
Carl: "What door?"
Alice: Her front door. Oh I forgot to say that. Her front door opened and closed and then she went into an emergency room in her house and then tried to call 911.
Carl: What is an emergency room?

Carl helped his group members by finding gaps in their writing. He brought the writer's attention to details that were omitted or vocabulary words that needed to be defined or clarified. His suggestions helped improve the readability of the essays.

Alice was a bright student who was more interested in the school's social life than she was in academics. She completed all assignments in a timely fashion but her idea of studying was to read the material over once very quickly. She enjoyed reading books such as *The Face on the Milk Carton* by Caroline B. Cooney and liked "being the kind of person who goes last. Like second. I don't like to be first…because I just want to hear what every person has and then see what I have," but when asked what role she played in

her writing group, she stated, “Well, Jill and me like we are the first ones to do everything, but like Kyle and Jill are the big people, and Carl and me just sit back and give ideas.” Alice also explained her writing process, “Like I sit there for five minutes and think about what I’m going to write and then when I know what I’m going to write I sit there for another five minutes and figure it out, but when I’m home and I’m just like bored, I just doodle and just write, but…writing is not my favorite thing. I’m not just that good…because I always take my time. I’d like to be fast and go.” She liked her writing group because “they tell me like what I need so I don’t have to read the whole thing; I just can get my writer’s notebook out and say on the third paragraph or wherever.” Alice benefited from her writing group because she used every suggestion they gave her.

Talk from Narrative Rubric Conference, April 15, 2004

The purpose of the following conference was to evaluate the essays. The focus of the talk sample was Jill’s essay, a story about a girl’s fright over scary events (like an ax through the door) until she realized the events were April’s Fool’s Day pranks. The entire story was very confusing because Jill did not establish the setting or characters for the reader (which she had done in her first draft, but she then changed her lead during a revision exercise in which the students were asked to begin the story in a different way), and because she kept going from first person to third person, a mistake she made in all drafts. Following is Jill’s lead.

> “Hi, I’m Jill,” the voice was like my third grade teacher scratching her nail on the chalkboard. It echoed in my mind replaying over and over again. I just ignored her and I ran into the market and got the soup that my parents asked for and trotted home.

Probably the most note-worthy observation is that Kyle, the student who identified the problem, did so because he had made the same mistake in his essay and the mistake was addressed in his student-teacher conference. Therefore, he was applying his knowledge to a new situation.

Table 4.6 Narrative Rubric Conference Talk: Jill, Alice, Kyle, Carl

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Jill	Well, Jill is someone her parents hire for the April's Fool's Day or wonder friends.	Content	Explanation
2	Carl	But, I do have one thing. Uh	Response	Question
3	Jill	What?	Response	Response
4	Carl	The thing you put is you said uh hide Jill in the bushes like my…ok, it echoed. I just ignored her and then Chuckie called for his parents. You're saying like you	Content	Questioning sequence of events
5	All	Yeah. It's confusing.	Reasons and Explanations	Agreement/evaluation
6	Kyle	That is what I told Alice. You are going from first person to third person.	Reasons and Explanations	Description of problem/suggestion
7	Carl	Yeah	Response	Agreement
8	Alice	No, no, no	Response	Challenge
9	Kyle	Listen, listen. Chuckie you can say I …my. Ok, it echoed in my mind. I just. Ok, ok. You are first person, right? You are talking like you are Chuckie and then you are talking like you are a narrator talking about Chuckie. That is third person. You can't switch from third person to first person. That is what I did in my story and Mrs. Bedard corrected it.	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation of problem
10	Alice	Look, Chuckie was thinking about what is going on in his mind.	Reasons and Explanation	Challenge
11	Kyle	No, she [I believe referring to Jill] just didn't notice.	Reasons and Explanations	Counter-challenge
12	Alice	Chuckie was thinking what is going on. How did she know where I was?	Reasons and Explanations	Elaboration of challenge
13	Carl	Who is Chuckie?	Content	Question
14	Jill	Chuckie is I.	Response	Response/Explanation
15	Alice	But you never introduced	Content	Identification of problem
16	Kyle	You can't switch from first person to third person.	Content	Restatement
17	Alice	You never introduced yourself. You have to say hi my name is. The voice sounded like my. Why is my?	Content	Explanation of problem
18	Jill	There's	Response	Response
19	Carl	But you have to say the name.	Reason and Explanation	Suggestion
20	Kyle	My third grade teacher. That's that's ok, but when she said, "When I got home I tried to go to bed. And then Chuckie comes in."	Content	Example
21	Alice	We don't know who Chuckie is.	Content	Identification of problem
22	Carl	Yes, we know who Chuckie is	Response	Challenge
23	Kyle	She is switching from third person to first person	Reason and Explanation	Restatement
24	Jill	Ok	Response	Agreement/Understanding
25	Carl	You either have to change I to Chuckie or Chuckie to I.	Reason and Explanation	Suggestion
26	Jill	Ok, but this is my final draft.	Procedures and Processes	Explanation
27	Alice	You just have to take that out.	Procedures and Processes	Suggestion
28	Jill	No, I can't. That's a mistake. Ok?	Response	Explanation
29	Alice	Ok…lead	Response	Agreement
30	Carl	We can count that as one	Procedures and Processes	Evaluation

Analysis of Talk

The most notable characteristics of this group were:

- The group understands that there are many possibilities/perspectives in writing (content).
- Students reread the essay, gave examples and explanations, and shared personal anecdotes in an effort to make their opinions/ideas/suggestions understood (process).
- Students are very rule conscious. (process)

Content Characteristics

In both the informative and narrative conferences this group had discussions about issues (pros and cons) or problems. The conversation was not linear; a suggestion was not given and then automatically accepted. Instead, discussions ensued, as in the talk sample, which explained the group members' ideas. In line 1, Jill tries to clarify a character, but immediately in both lines 2 and 4, Carl expresses his confusion. In line 5, all group members agreed that they did not understand the story and in line 6, Kyle labeled the problem. This time lapse was characteristic of this group. Originally the students first understood that there was a problem, but they did not immediately label the problem. After the problem was labeled, in line 9, Kyle explained it. Alice, illustrating that readers can interpret writing in different ways, took the stand that possibly the author (Jill) was intending to show the character's thoughts. This idea was challenged and the conversation reverted back to the confusion over the characters. In line 17 Alice points out that the characters had not been introduced. I have to assume at this point that Alice did not have a clear enough understanding of the technical terms, first person and third

person, to understand Kyle's restatement in line 16, "You can't switch from first person to third person." She did understand though that there was a problem and her solution was for the author, Jill, to introduce the characters. In line 24 though, Jill acknowledged that Kyle had identified the problem and in line 25 Carl spells out the details of how to correct the problem. The solution, as Kyle stated, was to decide what perspective you are going to write from and then maintain consistency. But in line 26 Jill begins the second theme that was very characteristic of this group, groups must follow the rules.

Process Characteristics

Probably because of Jill, who was adamant about following rules, this group viewed the rubric conference as an evaluation conference and not as a learning conference, although it was stressed many times that no draft was final until it was submitted for grading by the teacher. This group set rigid rules for each conference. In the brainstorming conference topic ideas were suggested. In the first draft conference, suggestions were made to improve the drafts, and in the rubric conference the purpose was to evaluate the drafts. As such, this group did not alter their drafts after they met for the rubric conference. As a result, suggestions made during the rubric conference were not acted upon. For example, Jill did not correct her point of view (first person/third person) problem in her narrative essay.

Introduction of Group Members: Beth, Bill, Lily, Joe

Beth, Bill, Lily, and Joe were students in a Fifth-Grade Advanced Class. All four students were friendly and got along well together. In a student interview Beth shared that she was the "big" manager of the group. Her job consisted of keeping members on

task and explaining the task for the day. She saw Lily as her helper, Bill as the group's technician, and Joe's role was to make sure everyone contributed. She liked working in a group because she stated, "If we didn't have writing groups I probably would get 76s [lower grades] because they help me elaborate, but sometimes they don't catch all of my mechanics (mistakes)." Beth was the type of student who benefited from peer assistance. She appreciated help and did not get offended by it because she evaluated it and only acted upon those suggestions she could see a reason for. Beth described herself as "a boring writer because I do not write exciting stuff." In reality Beth wrote about interesting topics, gun control and murders, but her writing was filled with gaps and sketchy elaboration.

Bill was labeled gifted and talented. He had a natural gift for technology and liked taking responsibility for setting up equipment and helping students who were experiencing computer problems or had computer related questions. Bill excelled in science, and his writing often incorporated scientific knowledge. When Bill was asked how he got his topic for his informative essay, he answered, "Well, I have been really interested lately in the whole pollution levels and all that and, like, glaciers melting and global warming." According to Bill, to write his informative essay he researched extensively, then "on a regular paper I did a few of my ideas, wrote them all down, not really too organized but a little organized. I wrote my first draft off of that and then I had that conference [first draft], and then I completely revised it." Bill credited his group for helping him improve his draft but in the informative essay the only suggestion that was given was to add more information. (Bill's first draft was eleven typed lines; his final draft was approximately 26 typed lines, and it included a visual.) During the narrative

essay the only suggestion given was to omit the prologue. Bill had included a prologue giving a history of the setting, background information on the characters, and the historical event that set the scene for the current story. The group members did not appreciate the creativity of the idea and many times did not fully understand the technical vocabulary Bill used like radioactive liquid plutonium, but they did understand that his personality was reflected in his writing.

Lily was an average student who did not stand out in the classroom. She rarely asked questions or caused disturbances. She had a cheery disposition and enjoyed school. She incorporated stories that were told in the classroom in her writing, although not always accurately. When asked about her role in her writing group, she answered, "I play the person that wanted everything done…." She expressed frustration that the group would listen to essays multiple times, but in the transcripts it was revealed that she was one of two group members who repeatedly asked for suggestions. A perusal of her first draft revealed many major changes. In the student interview, Lily explained her revisions to her informative essay introduction. "Well, I started off with something with no details in it, and then I changed it, and then I had too many facts, and it telling all the pros and all the cons in one paragraph." Lily took pride in her essays and especially enjoyed choosing her own topics.

Joe came from a family who, according to his mother, consisted of two sisters who were over-achievers and excellent students. Joe, on the other hand, struggled at school. His parents compensated for the discrepancy by allowing him to miss school frequently, providing individual tutors who completed his assignments for him, and rewarding him monetarily for even small accomplishments. Joe had trouble making friends and was

often teased by other students. He aspired to be a star athlete, a member of the in-crowd, and a good student, but he struggled daily to keep himself organized and lacked the self-discipline to tackle tasks such as studying for tests or reading books. Unlike the other members of his writing group that assumed a role, Joe just sat and did not participate until finally his group, realizing the problem, assigned him the role of making sure everyone contributed. Once given this role, Joe took it seriously and enjoyed participating in the group. He did not see himself as a good writer because, according to him, "I'm not really fast, and I can't just get ideas. Usually I have to go on the computer and get some ideas. I can't pop an idea just like that." He also stated that he got ideas from his group. He said, "We have conversations sometimes, and I ask them how because I don't know if this is very good or not, and they tell me yes or no." Joe benefited both socially and academically from his participation in the writing group.

Talk from Informative First Draft, February 5, 2004

The talk sample below consists of the entire conference, 36 idea units. Quick, short, and to-the-point conferences reflected this group's style. In the sample, all four essays were read and suggestions given for each essay. The four topics were: Gun Control, Banned Books, Feeding the Deer in Lake, and Mass Transit. Two school days later another conference was held that was slightly longer, seventy idea units, but the content of the talk and pacing of the conference did not vary.

Table 4.7 Informative First Draft Conference Talk: Lily, Beth, Joe, Bill

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Lily	…Feeding the Deer in Lakeway. I need a stronger ending. That is what I figured out.	Content	Thinking out loud
2	Joe	[reads essay, Banned Books]	Processes and Procedures	Inform
3	Lily	I wouldn't put the bad word in there.	Content	Suggestion
4	Joe	And you don't think I should put "shut up" in there?	Content	Question
5	Lily	No	Response	Response

6	Joe	I didn't know what to put there.	Content	Seeking help
7	Beth	Joe, what I would do is um just put cuss words or bad words	Content	Suggestion with examples
8	Lily	Bad words that we shouldn't say.	Content	Piggy backed suggestion with example
9	Bill	Or words such as "bleep"	Content	Example
10	Beth	His example, do not say the word	Content	Restate example
11	All	Laughter	Phatic	Expression of feelings
12	Beth	[reads gun control]	Processes and Procedures	Inform
13	Joe	I have an idea. Maybe we should have guns in America. Did you say that? And then, DO YOU? And that should be the end.	Content	Suggestion
14	Lily	Yeah, I ended with a question mark too.	Content	Agreement, explanation
15	Bill	I think you should have gotten more detail about the part where it said a little girl…there was a little story in there I forgot	Content	Suggestions
16	Beth	Oh, a woman has guns…	Content	Explanation of suggestion
17	Bill	Yeah, I think you should put more detail	Content	Restatement
18	Joe	You know you put, "Is it safe that sometimes a baby will get a gun and don't know what it is?"	Content	Question
19	Beth	Many babies die of guns, too.	Content	Clarification response
20	Joe	Don't you think you should put how many people do that yearly?	Content	Suggestion
21	Beth	[response not understandable]	Content	Response
22	Joe	Not how old, but how many die in a year.	Content	Clarification of previous question
23	Beth	Will, could you find that on the internet?	Processes and Procedures	Seeking assistance
24	Lily	You could add all that up.	Content	Elaborating on suggestion
25	Beth	Yeah	Response	Agreement
26	Bill	Mine is really short. [reads essay, Mass Transit]	Content	Inform
27	Joe	What is mass transit?	Content	Question
28	Bill	Mass transit is the same thing as public transportation except like buses, subways, or trains.	Content	Explanation/definition
29	Lily	More information. It looks like you have a lot of research but you don't.	Content	Suggestion
30	Bill	I told you this was just my first draft.	Content	Challenge
31	Lily	What do you think of my paper?	Processes and Procedures	Question---seeking help
32	Joe	It is good.	Response	Affirmation
33	Lily	I think I need a stronger ending. Do you think I need a stronger ending?	Content	Thinking aloud/Seeking advice
34	All	Yes!	Response	Agreement
35	Joe	You should give an example like do you feed the deer?	Content	Suggestion
36	Lily	That is what [not understandable] said.	Response	Response

Analysis of Talk

The most notable characteristics of this group were:

Content Characteristics

- The conversations were not in-depth. Suggestions were given with limited explanations or elaborations and rarely were the suggestions challenged.
- Learning from peers was evident in each conference.

Process Characteristics

- The pacing of the conferences was very fast but multiple conferences were held to review the same essays. Usually a group member would ask the other members to meet again during lunch. Everyone always obliged.

Reading over the transcript one does not get the feeling that the conferences set the world on fire if one thinks in terms of improving the drafts, but the conferences did provide opportunities for the students to think about their writing as was evidenced in line one when Lily states, " Feeding the deer in Lake. I need a stronger ending. That is what I figured out." Lines 3 through 10 offer a good illustration of the group working together on a suggestion. Lily suggested in line 3 to omit a word. In line 4 Joe clarified the word. Lines 7 through 10 are examples of how to carry out the suggestion from each of the group members. Finally, the exchange ended in laughter in line 11, and the laughter served also as the transition into the next topic, gun control in line 12. As was characteristic of this group, there was a rapid exchange of suggestions. In just ten exchanges (lines 13-22), three suggestions were given, explained, and agreed upon. In the next three lines (23-25) a plan was formulated to obtain the information for one of the suggestions. The conversation turned quickly to the next essay and in lines 27 and 28 learning took place; Bill explained with examples the definition of mass transit. This was followed by one suggestion (line 29) to get more information and a challenge or rebuttal was given in line 30 when Bill responded that "this is just my first draft." Lily, in line 31, sought the group members' opinions about her paper. Joe (line 32) affirmed that it was good. In line 33 Lily restated her earlier musing that the ending needed to be stronger and all agreed. Quickly Joe offered one suggestion, and the conference ended with Lily

acknowledging that the same suggestion came from another person. All conferences had the same quick, short answer pattern. There were no long discussions or debates. This group had as its goal to improve the essays and did not get sidetracked with personal opinions or anecdotes.

Introduction of Group Members: Tara, Kris, Jack, Paul

Tara, Kris, Jack, and Paul were in a Fifth-Grade Advanced Class. Jack and Paul were labeled gifted and talented. All four students were friendly, courteous, and enjoyed school.

Tara was an over-achiever. She spent an inordinate amount of time studying each day. For example, the students were asked to take information from an informative essay they had completed and incorporate it into a children's book for a kindergarten student. Tara had researched Babe Ruth. For the children's book she examined the book, *Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888* by Thayer and Bing (2000) and used a similar structure (a fictional story is told, and on each page of the story there are facts about the game of baseball). She first wrote a songlike story. Following is a short excerpt:

He [Babe Ruth] has always had this wonderful swing.

This easy, upthrusting swing

This pretty swing not taught by any coach.

One day the Babe just swung and he had it.

It was his swing and it would be remembered forever.

She then took pictures from the internet of Babe Ruth throughout his career and made a collage for the front cover. The book was thirty-pages and had fifteen pictures and fifteen fact inserts. Although the majority of students never worked on the project outside of class, Tara spent many hours working on it at home despite the fact that she also was involved in several extra-curricular activities such as soccer and dance. Tara enjoyed the challenge of researching complex topics like Animal Experimentation and writing narratives with multiple plot lines. Her writing group credited her with giving them ideas, improving their vocabulary usage, and adding figurative language.

Kris was a well-organized, conscientious student. Kris was notable for her honesty. She critiqued the work of others and her own work in a very direct, non-partial manner. She was an eagle-eye editor and according to Tara, she "gives really good suggestions and everybody else is like wow, I would have never thought of that. [For example], she saw an idea and thought of another idea that would go along really good with it." According to Kris, she was the type of person that never gave up. In her writing when she settled on a topic she was committed to it. Her topic for the informative essay was the nutritional value of candy. For obvious reasons, Kris had both teacher and peer pressure to change her topic, but she held fast and wrote a very informative persuasive paper. Kris described improvement in her writing as having the ability to "not take everyone's ideas but to keep some of my own ideas." She explained in the student interview that at the beginning of the year she would take everyone's ideas but now she was selective and even when she did take an idea she played with it until she felt like it was her own idea.

Jack was a very quiet, unassuming young man with a great sense of humor. During the student interview Jack was asked to comment on his writing. He replied, "One thing

about my writing is I remember at the beginning of the year the first thing I wrote I thought it would be the perfect thing…and now I look back at it, and I think what was I thinking? That was junk!" Jack liked working in his group and felt like the group members had given him many useful suggestions. For example, he told about the time when he wrote the word, bye, at the end of an essay and two of his group members said, "No way!!! Why did you put that?" Laughingly he said "I realized that it [using the word bye] was really stupid." Jack was a good writer although as Jack readily admited his writing did not have many writing techniques, and it was a little confusing at times.

Paul was a very bright student; he was an excellent writer and avid reader, but he had attention deficit issues and weak organizational skills, both which affected his writing and participation in his writing group. The members of his group described Paul as an excellent writer who had minimal influence on the group. Jack stated, "He just read over his paper and maybe looks away and thinks about what he's done" during conferences. In a student interview Kris stated bluntly that she would rather not be in a writing group than to have to be with Paul because he drums his fingers constantly.

Paul viewed the situation differently. He said of his writing group, "I think they are fun and really easy to work with; they are really helpful and give me a lot of suggestions like they told me to add another side to my persuasive paper. And they tell me if I am getting too rowdy and stuff." According to Paul, he made significant improvement during the year because he brought every paper to completion; in fourth-grade he never finished a writing assignment.

Talk from Informative Rubric Conference, February 17, 2004

Two samples of talk are presented because the functions of talk that merited highlighting occurred in two different conferences, the rubric conference and the first draft conference.

In the first sample of talk the group was evaluating Paul's essay, *Video Games*. They based their evaluation on the standard set in a rubric that was created jointly by the students and teacher. The elements in the rubric corresponded to the mini-lessons taught for that particular piece of writing. This sample was selected because it highlighted two functions of talk, self-advocating and self-evaluation. The term self-advocating was used to describe talk in which the student was locating examples to satisfy a requirement. The opposite of self-advocating was when students did not speak up in their behalf and just allowed the other group members to make evaluations without input. Self-evaluation was when students judged their own essays.

Table 4.8 Informative Rubric Conference Talk: Tara, Kris, Jack, Paul

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Paul	[reads essay, Video Games]	Content	Inform
2	Jack	Was it I or was I not listening, but I just heard one side of the issue.	Content	Identifying Problem
3	Paul	My parents say that video games are addictive and waste time. There are only a couple of games I like to play. They are sports games. They don't like video games rated X and up. My brothers and I only have one game rated mature because it came with the X box.	Content	Clarification
4	Jack	Cool	Response	Affirmation
5	Tara	Did you ever play it? [referring to mature game]	Phatic Dimension	Off –task related talk
6	Paul	Yes, but my brother's X box broke.	Phatic Dimension	Off-task related talk
7	Kris	There are some opinions in there. So he presented both sides of the issue. Anecdote…yeah, he said my brother and I have only one kind of game. Explanations, explanations are like	Content	Evaluation with examples
8	Jack	Reasons	Reasons and Explanations	Completing thought
9	Tara	It explains it. Didn't he have that in there?	Reasons and Explanations	Define technical term/ Question
10	Paul	Explain what?	Response	Seeking clarification
11	Kris	Why video games are good.	Response	Clarification
12	Paul	Why video games are good. Why video games are bad. There's some stuff in the first paragraph.	Reasons and Explanations	Self-advocating
13	Kris	I think he got an advanced on that.	Procedures and Processes	Evaluation

14	Tara	I think so too. Definitions, did he have any definitions?	Response/Content	Agreement/Question
15	Kris	No, not really	Response	Evaluation
16	Tara	Descriptions	Content	Inform
17	Paul	Yeah, I described all the games that I named.	Reasons and Explanations	Self-advocacy
18	Tara	I think you got an advanced on that.	Procedures and Processes	Evaluation
19	Jack	Yeah	Response	Agreement
20	Kris	Writing techniques…reads rubric	Procedures and Processes	Inform
21	Paul	Yeah, I got text sizing.	Reasons and Explanations	Self-advocating
22	Kris	Yes, definitely	Response	Agreement
23	Paul	Don't say I don't have quotes. My parents said…	Reasons and Explanations	Self-advocating
24	Jack	You don't have any hyperboles.	Content	Identifying problem
25	Paul	Hyperbole, what is that? I forget what that is.	Content	Question
26	Tara	Exaggeration	Response	Defining technical term
27	Paul	Arnold Schwarzennager, he pulled out the trigger.	Content	Self-advocating
28	Tara	Did you exaggerate that?	Content	Question
29	Paul	Yes, Arnold S. is a body-builder. He was in action movies and stuff.	Content	Explanation
30	Jack	Personification?	Content	Process and procedures
31	Tara	I don't think so.	Response	Evaluation
32	Paul	No, neither did I.	Response	Self-evaluation
33	Kris	Onomatopoeia?	Content	Process and procedures
34	Paul	Sounds? No sounds.	Content	Self-evaluation

Talk Analysis

Process Characteristics

Two functions of talk, self-advocating and self-evaluating, required of the students a working knowledge of the technical terms on the rubric. From an affective perspective, I believe it can be inferred that these behaviors illustrate a high degree of commitment or investment in one's work.

In line 2, Jack identified a problem, presenting only one side of the issue; Paul clarified the situation in line 3 with examples from his essay. In line 4, Jack accepted Paul's explanation and responded affirmatively. Lines 6 and 7 are extensions of Paul's explanation but not necessary to the task at hand. Therefore, they were coded as off-task talk. In line 7 Kris began to evaluate the paper and in line 11 questions where some information was. Paul advocated for himself by giving the location of the material

(L12) and thus satisfied the rubric requirement and as such promoted his cause and improved his grade. The same pattern of interaction was seen in lines 16 and 17, lines 20 and 21, and lines 23 and 27. In line 30 Jack noted another requirement, personification. In line 31 Tara stated that he did not have personification and in line 32 Paul gave a self-assessment. The pattern repeated in lines 33 and 34.

Talk from Narrative First Draft Conference, April 1, 2004

Identifying problems and giving suggestions are the caviar of first draft conferences because they satisfy the purpose of those conferences, essay improvement. In this talk sample the group was reviewing Tara's essay, *Killing Superstition*; the story was about a group of girls who experienced seven hours of bad luck because of a broken mirror. The plot line had several gaps and was not realistic. (Police were called about a murder, and they responded that they would be by in a few minutes to take the body away. Before the police arrived all the girls fell asleep.)

Table 4.9 Narrative First Draft Conference Talk: Tara, Kris, Jack, Paul

Line	Speaker	Talk	Subject Matter Classification	Function of Talk
1	Tara	[reads narrative]	Content	Inform
2	Kris	Hold on. I have a question. Maybe you should put a blood curdling scream.	Content	Suggestion
3	Tara	A what?	Response	Seeking clarification
4	Kris	A blood curdling scream because she's going to die	Reasons and Explanations	Explanation
5	Jack	And	Phatic Dimension	Thinking aloud
6	Kris	And she was scared	Reasons and explanations	Completing explanation
7	Jack	And it says I heard a screaming under your bed and then you went to go get a drink of water. Is that? That, that doesn't flow.	Content	Identifying problem
8	Tara	Ok, um. I'm going to change that. ..	Response	Understanding
9	Jack	OK	Response	Agreement
10	Kris	What is the horrible sound?	Content	Question
11	Tara	You are going to find out.	Response	Response
	Tara	Can you stop that?	Phatic Dimension	Remark is directed at Paul to refocus his attention.
12	Paul	I'm still listening.	Response	Explanation
	Paul	You know how as fast as a cat pounced? That doesn't sound very scary. Maybe you should say.	Content	Question/Opinion/ Suggestion
13	Kris	It's not explaining how scary something. It's just saying how fast they turned off the TV.	Reasons and Explanations	Challenge
14	Jack	What you could put is as fast as a cheetah.	Content	Suggestion
15	Paul	Would tear up a dead carcass.	Content	Piggybacking on suggestion

16	Jack	Yeah, as fast as a cheetah	Response	Restatement
17	Tara	Ok, I'll remember that.	Response	Agreement
18	Jack	Hold on, hold on. There's a back door in your basement?	Content	Identifying a problem
19	Paul	A really good point, Jack.	Response	Affirmation
20	Jack	So wait, he	Content	Identifying problem
21	Tara	See because we broke the mirror which was the seven hours of bad luck.	Reasons and explanation	Explanation
22	Kris	But you dropped the candle before you broke the mirror.	Content	Identifying problem
23	Tara	Yeah, that was the one thing that I forgot about.	Response	Understanding

Talk Analysis

Content Characteristics

This sample of talk demonstrated two functions of talk, identifying problems and giving suggestions. The conversation began with a suggestion (Line 2) followed by an explanation (Lines 4 and 6). This pattern (suggestion or identification of problem followed by an explanation) occurred several times. Two sequencing problems were identified (lines 7 and 22) and one incongruent detail (line 18). The two suggestions given in this sample involved figurative language (lines 12 and 17) and vocabulary (lines 2 through 6). No content suggestions were given. In contrast, each group member received at least one content suggestion during the persuasive first draft conference. For example, it was suggested to Tara to include information on at least one animal experiment for her essay, "Animal Experimentation Issues," and Jack was told to state his position on the use of mass transit.

In the student interviews held April 30, 2004, three of the six writing groups commented that group members helped correct the narratives, especially sequencing problems, rather than giving plotline ideas whereas in the informative essay the emphasis was on content ideas. For this group these genre-based comments held true.

Insights about Talk

From the analyses of talk in peer writing conferences emerged pictures of the importance of talk and group interaction to writing and learning processes and to the development of a sense of student empowerment.

What These Analyses Suggest About Talk in Writing Groups

Talk in Writing Groups Supports Learning

According to Oakeshott (1962), we can think because we can talk because many of the social forms and conventions of conversation parallel the forms and conventions of reflective thought. Human conversation takes place within us (Vygotsky's inner speech) as well as among us (social speech), and as conversation takes place within us, it is reflective thought (Bruffee, 1984). Thus, classroom talk unites the cognitive and the social. Mercer (1995) contends that students who develop an exploratory way of using language do better on problem-solving activities that require rational, justified reasoning. Therefore, the first step to learning to think better is learning to converse in an exploratory manner. Following is an example of students using exploratory talk during a problem-solving activity. The students were matching dogs to families. There were six dogs and five families so one dog was going to be put down. The students had information about each of the families and dogs.

Table 4.10 Exploratory Talk During a Problem-Solving Activity

Line	Speaker	Talk	Comment
1	Tom	Jack is a bloodhound cross. His favorite thing to do is sit by the fire. Jess does not like people or playing.	Facts from handout
2	Tom	If he does not like people, he should be the one that does not get the match.	Opinion given with justification
3	Ellen	Oh, Scooter is only six months old.	Fact
4	Tom	He does not like doing what he is told.	Fact
5	Kate	This one is a guard dog.	Fact
6	Tom	We should give the guard dog because they are going to be gone.	Opinion given with justification.

7	Ellen	Oh I know, but if they have a park five minutes away, then Scooter likes to play. Ok, but he is not a guard dog.	Opinion given with justification.
8	Tom	Ok, Scooter should go with them.	Compromise
9	Ellen	Wait, they [dog] have to like kids. They have to like quiet.	Facts
10	Kate	Well, Scooter's only six months	Fact
11	Ellen	It says bloodhound cross, male, four years, large, yes likes to sit by the fire, dislikes cats	Facts
12	Tom	That sounds like not the park, not the park because there are cats at the park. I would say he was the one who gets put to sleep.	Opinion with justification.

In the talk sample, the students use facts to justify their ideas. The students are challenging each other and justifying their challenges with facts. Their thinking/reasoning is visible and according to Lotman (1988), when language is treated dialogically, as in the previous discussion, it is used as a thinking device. This sample illustrates components of three of the five areas of analysis, functions of talk (students challenged, counter-challenged, and justified their ideas; reasoning was visible), descriptions of talk (lengthy discussion of one topic with multiple short responses), and process patterns (interruptions and interspersed comments).

According to Bakhtin (1981), meanings unfold in the interaction of two or more conversants. In the study, new vocabulary words were learned, the students' knowledge about a topic was influenced by the group discussion, and learning was enhanced when students related personal experiences to new ideas. For example, during the narrative rubric conferences, the following exchanges took place:

Tara: Alex was joking about a serial killer.
Kris: By the way, what is a serial killer?
Paul: He kills people for fun.
Kris: I thought it was the food, cereal.
Tara: Yeah, what does cereal have to do with this?
Jack: It starts with an s. You know when you have a serial number?
Tara: Ok.

Kate: I don't know what crimson means.
Tom: It is a color.

Kate: It is? Well,
Tom: Well, what color could it be? It is a red color.
Kate: Oh
Tom: Dark red
Ellen: See, I didn't know that.
Casey: Simple color; I didn't know crimson red.
Tom: How did you not know that?
Casey: I guess we're idiots then.
All: [laughter]

These talk samples illustrate how the students learned from each other. A very important point to note is that in both samples group members stated frankly that they did not know the meaning of a word. The students were not embarrassed to ask for help or to ask for someone to explain a word. In fact, in the second example three of the four group members stated they did not know the word crimson. Although Tom described the word crimson fairly explicitly, note that Kris probably learned that the word serial was not a type of food, but she was given two meanings of the word serial, a serial killer and a serial number. Therefore, it can be inferred that she did not gain a precise understanding of the various meanings associated with the word, serial. This pattern, global learning, was typical. Often the students gained a generalized understanding of a word or topic, but not an in-depth, precise understanding.

Analysis of the data revealed that learning occurred in all types of conferences. During all conferences students learned new vocabulary words, and they gained new ideas and perspectives from each other. For example, when Russ wrote his first draft on cell phones, he only included two ideas: [cell phones are bad because] "kids brain is still too small and cell phones give radiation from the cell phone towers"(which I am assuming he meant that the radiation can harm kids' brains) and "cell phones can be really helpful to kids if there is bad situation like fire, mom is really sick, so kids can call

to 911 and get some help and we will be safe." In the following discussion several new ideas were mentioned and discussed (and subsequently added to Russ's final essay.)

Jeff: I think cell phones; I think cell phones are good for kids because…
Peter: Because if a kid gets lost
Jeff: Because if a kid gets lost and he's like trapped inside or if he's trapped in something
Peter: OK, time out. You know how you get your old cell phones from your dad, but they don't work? They just have a battery and you can play games on them? You can still call 911 on it, and it will work.
Russ: I know.
Peter: Exactly, so you don't need a cell phone with a [tower].
Michael: I think you should put entertainment.

In the example, Michael listens to Peter's explanation of the benefits of an old cell phone and then relates the anecdote to the idea of entertainment. Russ also gains two new ideas, cell phones can be used if you are lost, and cell phones can be used for entertainment. New perspectives about the topic were gained and learning occurred. Cognitive psychologists have long known that learning is enhanced when students relate what they must learn to what they already know (Miller, 1956; Wittrock, 1990). Wittrock (1990) also believes that learning is heightened when students relate personal experiences in their own words.

Talk in writing groups also facilitated students' abilities to elaborate their ideas. Pressley and colleagues (1992) state that understanding and retention are promoted by self-generated elaborations. In the following example, Tara elaborates or explains her topic, animal experimentation.

Jack: Are the experiments to help the humans or to help the animals?
Tara: They are to help the humans. Like most of them are to help the humans. Like to test out medicine and cosmetics and all that stuff on animals and sometimes it hurts the animals and some of it doesn't even work on humans. But some scientists just do it just just to do it like some scientists injected this thing from a jelly fish into this fish and it makes

> them grow neon, and they made money off of it because they made like this world out of it; it was like jelly world or something and made money off of it, but the fish can never have babies again.

As Tara answered Jack's simple question, are the experiments to help the humans or to help the animals, (which could have been answered in one word, humans or animals), she synthesized knowledge from various sources (Internet site and *Time for Kids* magazine). Her response contained information that was not included in any of her written drafts. Therefore, the discussion provided the opportunity for Tara to extend her learning beyond the actual assignment. According to Norman and Rumelhart (1975), the more a learner controls his language strategies, and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypotheses and evaluating them. This contributes to learning in which restructuring of old information is necessary to account for new information. Vygotsky, Burner, and Luria (in Emig, 1977) have all pointed out that higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis, seem to develop most fully only with the support system of verbal language, particularly, it seems of written language.

Talk in Writing Groups Supports the Collaborative Learning Model

Examining how talk worked in the writing groups, this study's findings with respect to group interactions include:

1. Groups should work under a system in which the group rewards are based on the sum of group members' individual learning. This is important because this system encouraged all group members to help every group member. This system was especially important when there were group members with poor organizational skills which resulted in the students not completing their assignments in a timely fashion. As a result, the group members would have to meet during their recess time. The groups decided on this solution on their own. Consequently, I assumed that it was concern for their own grade and a

sense of loyalty that the group members developed toward each other that caused the students to act so conscientiously.

2. Groups developed a sense of camaraderie

3. Groups should stay intact for the duration of the school year or academic course. As mentioned earlier, the group members developed a sense of loyalty towards each other. They became familiar with each other's ideas, writing styles, writing difficulties, and work habits. They built a history together. For example, group members, Lee, Susan, and Brad knew that George was very interested in military topics, and George, Susan, and Brad knew that Lee's passion was women's rights.

4. Mixed gender-groups allowed greater opportunity for developing students' co-operative and communicative abilities.

5. Each group developed its own personality and identity.

6. Groups encouraged group norms for interaction and behavior.

Slavin (1987) looked at collaborative learning from both a behavioral and humanistic perspective and discovered that it was the combination of group rewards based on group members' individual learning and peer interaction on learning tasks that was necessary to produce learning gains. These data supported Ladson-Billings' (1994) push for classrooms in which students view each other as extended family. In such classrooms students are responsible for monitoring one another's academic work and personal behavior and for solving group problems. Group members talk with one another and provide academic assistance.

In this study, the students' writing conferencing grade was derived from an average of the four group members' final essay grades. Although the incentive cannot be directly related as the cause for the willingness for the group members to help each other, it should be noted that students were always eager to participate in all writing conferences. In fact, the students developed a great camaraderie with each other and

provided much support, both moral and academic. In the final student interview, all students indicated that they wanted to be in a writing group the next year and many displayed a sadness that their group experience was coming to a close. Lee, Susan, George, and Brad's group expressed this sentiment:

Brad: Is this the last writing group thing we are going to do?
Mrs. B: Yes
Brad: Darn it!
Mrs. B: Why did you say darn it?
Brad: Cause, I don't know. I just like being with my writing group.
George: We have been together a long time.
Brad: And it's fun.
Lee: I just like. It's like. It's like having friends. And the show is ending.
(Lee is referring to the ending of the sitcom, Friends.) You are beginning a show and you are getting really into it, and it's over.
Susan: You can't go back.
Brad: Well, unless you have Time Warner video and then you can pause it on TV.
Mrs. B: When I start the groups next year, what is a suggestion that you can give me?
Brad: Make sure they [students] are friends.
Susan: Half boys and half girls.
Mrs. B: Why is that important?
Susan: Because they [girls] need to learn to get along with boys.
Lee: And boys have different ideas than girls. So we have different
Susan: opinions.
Mrs. B: What other suggestions would you give?
Brad: Don't leave anybody out.
Lee: Make sure you follow the rules up there on the shelf (Talk Lesson Group Rules)
Mrs. B: Do you think it helped that we did those Talk Lessons?
All: Yes!
Brad: That is where I got the idea don't leave anybody out.
Mrs. B: How would you say your writing group helped your writing?
George: By getting more suggestions of what I need
Brad: Like I hear his story and you [George] kept saying I and then you started saying him.
Lee: I know; we helped him a lot with that.

(The conversation continued with each student giving specific suggestions they had received.)

During the conversation, the students illustrated several important points. One, they showed the camaraderie that the students developed. This is important because Bruffee (1985), along with other scholars of writing—Murray (1996), Calkins (1991), Lensmire (2000), and Dyson (2003)--- has written about the importance of groups' many intimate ties with writing and learning processes: "Students can write effectively only to people with whom they have been and continue to be in conversation," (p. 3). At the end of the first semester, the students were asked if they wanted to remain with the same writing group for the 2nd semester. Twenty-one students wanted to remain together; two wanted to change writing groups, and nine students did not comment or their comment was neutral. The reasons the students gave for wanting to remain with the same group were: (1) the group had already worked hard to become cohesive, (2) members became familiar with each group member's writing and therefore knew what mistakes to look for, (3) group members enjoyed seeing progress made by group members, and (4) each group had its own way of working. The two opposing viewpoints were: (1) students could learn more from different group members, and (2) they would be exposed to different ideas.

A second important point the conversation illustrated is that the students felt that it was preferable to have mixed-gender groups. This group mentioned that boys and girls should learn to work together and felt that the different genders had different perspectives. The all-male group agreed with the need for mixed-gender groups but for another reason. Michael and Peter stated:

> Michael: Well, I think it (grouping) worked out well, but I think it might have worked out better if there's like
> Peter: Jill or somebody.

It was a well-known fact in the classroom that Jill was a task-master, and the all-boy group recognized that often they needed someone to keep everyone on task. The all-boy group didn't necessarily state that they needed a girl but recognized that they needed a different mix of abilities. Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif (2000) noted that "There are many factors to be taken into consideration when dividing the class into groups for each Talk Lesson" (p. 6). They suggested considering groups of three children of mixed ability, including both sexes, and at least one child who may be likely to encourage more reluctant individuals to participate and one child who can read write reasonably well. As was described earlier in Chapter Three: Methods, when the pilot study was initiated, ten groups were formed. Two of the groups could not participate in the study because parents refused to grant permission. Of the eight remaining groups, five were mixed-gendered and three were same-gender groups. Liz, a member of an all-girl group summed up the feelings of the same-gender group when she stated, "I have learned that working with an entire group of girls isn't as easy as I thought it would be." Doris, another member of an all-girl group said, "The most important thing I learned from the talk lessons is how not to start arguing over some little thing." Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif (2000) also contend that "Friendship groups may not be ideal…, as friends working together tend to agree with each other's suggestions, without critical consideration" (p. 6). Tara described the problem during a student interview, "[Don't get all boy groups or all girl groups] because then it's like best friends, and you might blame each other and say, 'You should have told me this.' And you might break up the friendship so I would do boy girl, boy girl. All girl groups seemed like they were mad at each other most of the time. Like they were such good friends that couldn't get different ideas."

A point made during the student interview is that each group had its own way of working. Although all groups united the cognitive and the social, each group had their own unique way of accomplishing their goals. This finding was similar to the findings of the study conducted by Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2000). To encourage "liberation," Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen organized a high-school classroom so that students had input into the curriculum and classroom organization and had latitude in deciding how to act within the overall structure of the classroom. Keeping with Dewey's (1990) view that student interest should lead inquiry, students' needs and interest motivated much of the work. Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen found that while promoting certain type of behavior, the social context of the classroom lacked the power to determine action in the collaborative groups. Within the culture of the class, small groups formed their own local cultures, or idiocultures (Fine, 1987). Each group formed a relational framework that subsequently guided its interactions. These relationships varied considerably from group to group and had different consequences for both the equity of contribution within the groups and, in some cases, the appearance of the group product that resulted from their effort. In the current study, because of the talk lessons (as noted by Brad in a student interview), all students contributed equitably. To illustrate the groups' different interactive styles, another sample from the same talk lesson which required the group to pair a dog with a family will be presented followed by a comparison of the two styles. (The first sample is on page two of Chapter Six.)

Table 4.11 Interactive Styles During Talk Lessons

Line	Speaker	Talk	Comment
1	Michael	Miss Pamela Young is 30 years old so she is still young so she would probably like a dog, and one that is stylish or something.	Fact from handout

2	Russ	Fifi	No reason given
3	Jeff	He is the best.	No reason given.
4	Peter	Dude, it's a 30 year old woman.	Fact from handout
5	Russ	A 30 year old woman	Repeats fact
6	Peter	Dude, she's insane probably.	Fact NOT in handout
7	Michael	Plus, she's home most of the day…so she would be watching. She would be home enough to watch the poodle.	Fact from handout and reason given for opinion
8	Peter	Yeah, I think the poodle for that	No reason given to justify opinion.
9	Russ	Yeah, poodle, poodle	No reason given to justify opinion.
10	Jeff	I think not.	No reasons given to justify opinion.
11	Russ	I do. You are the only one that don't want him.	Opinion given with non-factual justification.
12	Jeff	Well, it hates the vet; it's not going to try to go into the vet's office. It's going to try to run away.	Justification is factual (hates the vet) but he is going to try to run away is not on fact sheet
13	Peter	All you have to do is put a collar on him.	Challenge
14	Jeff	It's going to try to run away. It's going to try to slip out of such things and and get hit by a car.	Counter-challenge based on personal opinion
15	Michael	That is what they [leashes] are made for.	Challenge
16	Peter	Yeah, I know.	
17	Russ	They have leashes.	
18	Jeff	But Cassie is a good dog.	Switches reasoning
19	Peter	A good dog, but he's not going to last that long.	Justification is based on the fact that Cassie is ten years old.
20	Russ	Mrs. Jenkins have to have the Cassie because she old and	Justification based on fact from handout
21	Michael	The only point I'm trying to make is neither is Mrs. Jenkins; she is 75 years old.	Reason justified with facts from handout
22	Russ	No way. You crazy.	
23		Conversation switches to another dog.	

In the first sample Tom, Ellen, and Kate justify all of their opinions with facts from the fact sheet (lines 2, 6, 7, and 12). In contrast, Russ, Michael, Jeff, and Peter use both facts from the handout and ideas from their personal knowledge base. In Russ's group, reasons are also frequently given with no justification (lines 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10 in sample two). Qualitatively, the two conferences also differed. Tom's group not only took a much more analytic approach, but they also approached the task in a more organized manner. The first conversation turn was, "Do you think we should write all the dogs down, and then we could match them?" In contrast, Russ's group's first response was

emotional, and it wasn't until the fifth conversation turn that any mention of a strategy for solving the problem was established. Their conversation began:

Peter:	No, no way dude. Fifi is ferocious.
Russ:	Let's kill her.
Peter:	Don't even think about this one; don't even think about it.
Jeff:	Unknown dog. How can it be an unknown dog? (referring to Gnasher whose breed is listed as unknown.)
Michael:	Ok, Ok, I'm going to read. I'll read the family's name and …

Tom's group had several "collaborative statements" such as "OK, everyone agree?" and "Yeah, ok," compromising statements such as, "Unless someone likes it [Gnasher] best," and organizational statements, "We have already done Jess." The problem was solved in approximately 122 conversation turns. In contrast, Russ's group solved the problem in approximately 319 conversation turns. The conversation in Russ's group was rich in personal anecdotes (My friend has a [not understandable], and he has a small house, no backyard in California, and he leaves it. And he [dog] likes to run around. My aunt is 97 people, and she has a cat and two dogs), rich in assumptions (Mrs. Jenkins is probably going to die in five year and then there will be a loose dog there), and rich in brusque remarks (So?, Jeff, you don't have that much brains, You're crazy!). Although the groups operated differently, they both completed the task, and both reported that they enjoyed the experience and hoped they would have more talk lessons like that.

Despite the fact that each group functioned differently, they all held to certain standards. One standard that each group expected was to be prepared. When students came unprepared, they were given no slack. When it was discovered that Carl showed up to the first draft conference without his draft, the following exchange took place:

Alice:	Well, Carl doesn't have his paper. Naughty, naughty boy.
Carl:	That's because I did until Roxanne lost it someway. But some

Jill: Don't blame it on Roxanne
Carl: She put her papers on mine and took it with her. She did.
Jill: Guys
Carl: But I remember some of my pros and cons.
Jill: Carl, it wasn't her fault; you are blaming.

Jeff was also chastised for not being prepared:

Russ: Jeff is a bad boy because he didn't finish his first draft.
Michael: Jeff, the point is that you HAVE to start your first draft.
Peter: Just start the freakin first draft.
Jeff I know. Who cares?
Peter: We won't insult you. All we want [is for you to] start your first draft.
Russ: Start the first draft, Jeff.
Michael: Jeff, you have a topic that is easy to write about.
Russ: So start it up.
Peter: We want to get a good group grade.
Russ: Mrs. Bedard
Jeff: I will start it. I will start it.

Although both groups (and the other groups) chastised members when they were not prepared, in the end they never complained when the group decided to miss their recess time to hold a conference for the delinquent students.

Another standard the students expected their group members to uphold was to stay focused and not cause distractions. In a student interview Paul was talking about his writing group and made the following comments:

> I think they are fun and really easy to work with. They are really helpful and give me a lot of suggestions like they told me to add another side to my persuasive paper. And they uh they tell me if I am getting too rowdy and stuff.

Paul was glad for the reminders; he credited his group for his improvement, "[I am going to beg my teacher to do groups] because actually last year [when I was not in a group] I did horrible on writing. I still have a story saved on a computer that is not finished." The

peer pressure the groups put on students who did not conform was seen as helpful because it was the push they needed to be successful.

The collaborative learning in the writing encouraged empowerment in two ways: (1) student voices were heard, and (2) through talk student developed a concept of self. Myers (1986) and Lensmire (2000) recognize that selves, knowledge, and discourse are all socially constructed, but they are both concerned that advocates of collaborative learning, in their zest for its appeal because it gives voice to students (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and interrupts the IRE (initiation, response, evaluation) participation structure in which the teacher is the commander-in-chief (Cazden, 2001), have overlooked the potential danger of validating uneven power structures, reinforcing the power of the dominant culture, and overlooking the wider social forces that structure the production of knowledge. The combination of teaching students about talk (through Talk Lessons) and their experiences in writing groups helped mitigate against unequal power distributions in these groups.

The issue of uneven power structures was discussed during the talk lessons which addressed the issue. In September before the start of a talk lesson the following review occurred during a mini-lesson:

Bedard: A group that cooperates: (students give ideas)

- Listens [to each other],
- Everyone pitches in ideas, and
- Compromises if you have an argument, and compromise does not mean that everyone has to agree; but you have to agree to disagree.

The students worked very hard (approximately forty-five minutes) to make a list of ground rules all group members could abide by. Following is a list of the rules for each class:

Table 4.12 Ground Rules

Group Rules created by Inclusion Class	**Group Rules created by Advanced Class**
Include everyone	Everyone should contribute evenly
Don't neglect ideas suggested by group members	Use other people's ideas; don't always use just your own ideas
Share ideas	Critique work, not people
Stay focused; don't mess around	Don't get sidetracked—stay on task
Don't always agree with your friends	Consensus is not necessary

The ground rules established during the talk lessons helped to establish a more equitable distribution of participation. It was not a situation where each person spoke the same number of times, but rather more of a situation where students knew it was their responsibility to contribute and to insure that all students had an opportunity to contribute and therefore, eliminate silenced voices.

The forces that did influence a student's ability to participate were writing expertise, oral fluency (Jeff was silenced at times because of his inability to express himself fluently), and organizational skills. (Several students, Joe, Paul, Jeff, Tom, and Carl, periodically had limited contributions because their essays were not complete.)

Overall, the talk lessons helped establish a social context in which the students achieved independence of thought and the freedom to express it responsibly. According to Edwards and Westgate (1994), "It is largely through talk that we develop our concepts

of self, as members of various social worlds which can be brought into focus and in which we can locate ourselves and recognize the values, rights and obligations which permeate them"(p. 15). For example, Dahl (1988) in her study of peer conference activity among fourth-grade learners in a writing workshop found that students used the peer conferences to accomplish specific purposes of their own. Similarly, during the informative first draft conference, Lee used the conference to discuss an issue she had given some thought to, "women's rights." The discussion was prompted by Lee's informative essay, "Should Girls Play Football?" In an interview Lee explained why she picked the topic.

> Lee: I guess it is kind of a spirit [that I've had] because sometimes it is fun to play a guy's sport like soccer, basketball, baseball, so I you think of a girl playing football, it doesn't really sound right, but if you actually think about it, women can do that.
> Mrs. B: And boys can be cheerleaders.
> Lee: Well, sometimes. They can all play together on a team and like sometimes I ask if I can play, and they'll [boys] say yes. And sometimes the girls are even better than the boys at punting, at throwing. It doesn't matter.

During the conference, Lee and Susan tried to debate the topic. They didn't get too far because the boys, Brad and George, agreed that girls can play all sports. The importance of the conversation though was that Lee had selected a topic that concerned her and through the discussion worked through issues (boys being cheerleaders, girls getting guns and going to war, women's rights beginning with Abigail Adams, unequal job opportunities due to gender). According to Nystrand (1997), "Good discourse facilitates learning, moreover, by promoting students' engagement with their studies"(p. 28). When students explain their thinking and not just report someone else's, they deal with things in their own frames of reference. In summary, Lee felt empowered; she had the opportunity

to express her viewpoints, to consider alternative perspectives, and to reflect where she fit into the picture.

In Jeff's narrative conference all three of his group members wanted him to change his lead. Although Jeff was not able to express his opinion well enough to change the members' opinions, he kept his lead. (It probably helped that the teacher agreed with Jeff that his lead was captivating.) The point though is that Jeff had the opportunity to feel a high level of commitment to his work. Similarly, Alice expressed in one student survey a feeling of empowerment or control; "I learned [in my writing group] to write whatever I want, share my feelings, and to tell myself I can write better." Group members affirmed each other's writing and provided a safe environment for risk-taking. Bruffee (1985) contends that writers need to return their writing to the context of face-to-face conversation because "knowing each other's work helps writers develop responsibility for what they have to say and the courage to say it, through the immediate response of a community of sympathetic peers (p. 137).

Summary of Findings for Question One: How Can Talk in Peer Writing Conferences Be Characterized?

The analysis of talk focused on five main areas: functions of talk patterns, descriptions of talk, process patterns, subject matter, and assessments of what students learned. Analysis of the data exposed several important findings. One, students who engaged in an exploratory manner of speaking justified their ideas and their reasoning became visible. Two, each group developed their own style of communicating. Some groups carried out long discussions and debates on a topic. Other groups' conversations consisted of short exchanges about multiple topics. Both styles proved effectual in

helping students communicate their ideas to the reader. Three, a variety of process patterns such as interruptions, confusions, self-advocating, interspersed comments, modification of ideas, and self-evaluating were evident in all groups. Four, the talk focused on the content and form of the essays. Five, students learned from each other and developed a feeling of empowerment. Six, groups should work under a system in which group rewards are based on the sum of group members' individual learning, and seven, two factors (gender and group members' writing, reading, and organizational abilities) should be considered when forming writing groups.

Chapter Five: Findings Two

This chapter focuses on the question, in what ways will peer conference suggestions influence writing? To answer this question, data were collected from taped writing group conferences and two student surveys. The analyses for this chapter occurred in four stages. In the first two stages the data was taken from the taped writing group conference transcripts. In stage one, open coding of each suggestion given during the narrative and informative writing conferences produced:

- A list of the types of suggestions given within four subject matter categories: content, form, mechanics, and processes and procedures and
- A picture of the frequency and usage of suggestions given for both essays (informative and narrative) combined and then for each essay individually.

In stage two, using the same format (both essays combined and then each essay analyzed separately) an analysis was done comparing the frequency and usage of suggestions for each of the six writing groups. In stage three, data were analyzed from the student surveys. A comparison between groups of the frequency and usage of suggestions was done on both essays, the informative and narrative essays, followed by analyses of each essay separately. Finally, in stage four a comparison was done between the number of suggestions given on the taped transcriptions and the number of suggestions reported in the student surveys. Tapes were transcribed and coded using Grounded Theory methodology as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Findings From Transcript Data

Types of Suggestions in First Draft Conferences

Each suggestion given during the peer writing group conferences was coded under one of four categories, content, form, mechanics, or procedures (Gere & Abbot, 1985).

Content

In the content category there were six subcategories: ideas, details, vocabulary, additions and deletions, elaborations, and sequencing. The subcategory ideas referred to groups members' offerings of new ideas for the text. For example, during the informative first draft conference Kyle, Jill, Carl, and Alice offered each other many new ideas. Jill's essay was about the need to have a D.A.R.E. program. Kyle suggested, "You could say that there are special officers who come and take the time [to lead the classes]." In Alice's essay about animal experimentation, Jill suggested, "I think you should put that like each year certain amount of animals die because of this [animal experimentation]. Two conversational turns later she elaborated on her idea, "like for example last [year] 64% of the monkeys have died on animal testing." Details were suggestions that often clarified or more specifically described an idea. For Tara's suspenseful narrative, she received three detail suggestions from her group members. Kris suggested, "You need to tell who your neighbor is. We didn't know he was your neighbor." Jack suggested, "What you could put is fast as a cheetah." Paul suggested, "When you break the mirror, break it on springs." Jack also gave Tara a sequencing suggestion, "And it says I heard a screaming under your bed, and then you went to go get a drink of water. That doesn't flow." Kris gave Tara a vocabulary suggestion: "Maybe you should put a blood curdling scream because she is going to die." Also in the narrative first draft conference, Tara

suggested to Kris to cut and add information. Tara: "…and all of a sudden you step into the jungle and instead of lions after you there [are] angry natives." All subcategories under the category content appeared in the narrative first draft conference; no sequencing suggestions were given in the informative first draft conference (The idea of sequencing was introduced during the narrative essay.)

Form

Under the category form there were seven subcategories: transitions, prologue, text-sizing, structure, title, audience, and endings. (Text-sizing is increasing or decreasing the size of the text to emphasize a word such as HURRY or hurry.) One suggestion referred to the intended audience. Kris wrote her informative essay about the nutritional value of candy. It contained several technical terms. Tara asked, "Who are you going to send this to? Kris replied, "My parents." Tara said, "It sounds like you are talking to a kid. If you are sending it to a parent you might want to…" (The last sentence in the essay was: Now that you know this valuable information, you can tell your mom and dad all about the nutritional value of candy. They'll be really surprised. I guarantee it!) Also under form was the sub-category prologue. Bill, a gifted student, included a prologue in his narrative essay. The use of a prologue had not been introduced in class and as such his group members were unclear about its purpose or connection to the story. (Bill used the prologue to introduce the legend of the great Indian tribe, the Banjanians. The Banjanians were characters in Bill's narrative.) Ending suggestions included cutting words like "the end" and "bye." A text-sizing suggestion was given to Lee to incorporate into her narrative. "After the gunshot you should make it weird. Type it up in big letters and go BOOM!" said Susan. Casey suggested to Ellen, who divided her narrative into

chapters, to clarify the transitions. For example, one chapter ended with "I blacked out" and the next chapter began, "Ahh! I heard my sister shriek." Hearing the suggestions Ellen recognized that she needed to include the phrase, "I woke up." Structure suggestions were directly related to the models the students perused before beginning to write. In the *Time For Kids* magazines the informative articles are structured with an essay and two columns, a "yes" column and a "no" column. Suggestions to structure essays like models were made. Other structural suggestions included: paragraphing, adding timelines, and adding time markers. Students piggybacked off of each other's ideas to suggest catchy titles. Example:

Lily: Bill, what is your title?
Bill: I don't have one yet.
Beth: How about "The Hollow Murder" or something?
Lily: Hold on, what was it called?
Beth: "The Hallow"
Bill: "The Tortured Souls"
Lily: Yeah, "The Hallowed Tortured Souls"
Bill: OK

Two subcategories, text-sizing and transitions, only appeared in narratives. Both categories were introduced during the time the students were writing their narrative essays.

Mechanics and Procedures

The three subcategories under mechanics included spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The students were instructed not to attend to mechanical errors during the first draft conferences and consequently there were only a total of six mechanical suggestions made during the informative conference and ten during the narrative conference. For example Susan read Lee's essay aloud, inserting punctuation or

correcting spelling errors, “There was a girl named Sally that was going to the prom with a boy name Kyle. (period) After the dance Kyle took Sally home. Sally’s mother and father invited Kyle to stay for coffee. I think coffee is spelled wrong. Let’s look it up in the dictionary.” Drawing on knowledge from a mini-lesson on pronoun usage, Kate pointed out to Tom that he did not identify who “they” were in the sentence, “Where did they go?” The one procedural suggestion, to underline material that was going to be cut, was given during an informative conference.

Table 5.1 Types of Suggestions in First Draft Conferences
Informative and Narrative Conference Data Combined

Category:	**Content**	**Form**	**Mechanics**	**Procedures**
	Ideas	Transitions	Spelling	Underlining
	Details	Prologue	Grammar	
	Vocabulary	Text-sizing	Punctuation	
	Add/Cut Information	Structure		
	Elaborations • Examples • Explanations • Anecdotes	Title		
	Sequencing	Audience		
		Ending		

Technical suggestions such as text-sizing, sequencing, and transitions, corresponded to instructional lessons. Students pulled suggestions from their own personal knowledge. When Kyle diagnosed the confusion in Jill’s narrative essay as a problem with perspective (Jill alternated from first person to third person), he stated, “That is what I did

in my story, and Mrs. Bedard corrected it." These suggestions were consistent with Dahl's (1988) finding that instructional context strongly influenced how learners went about conferencing with a peer.

The idea that students give suggestions based on their own personal knowledge was reinforced during a student interview when the question, what suggestions would you give me [the teacher] if I am going to form writing groups next year, was discussed. Tara, Paul, Jack, and Kris all agreed that groups should be composed of students with different strengths. Jack explained, "Writing groups help because we learn each other's strengths and weaknesses…." The group agreed that Kris was good at mechanics and weak at scariness; Paul was good at scariness and weak at mechanics; Jack was good at finding facts and weak at sequencing, and Tara's strengths were giving ideas and vocabulary words, and her weakness was surprising imagery. Tara wrote in the student survey, "If you put a variety of strengths in a group, it works well, and you get different ideas. If everyone in the group has the same strength, you will get the same ideas, and everyone in that group will get a bad grade in everything but the one strength everyone has." In summary, writing group members influence each other's writing by giving suggestions drawn from their knowledge and experience with language and writing.

Frequency and Usage of Suggestions in First Draft Conferences

The purpose of the first draft conferences was to provide suggestions to group members to help them improve their essays. The primary focus was content (76% of suggestions) and form (14%) because students would be participating in an editing conference at a later point in time. Drawing loosely from Elbow's (1973) conception of a "teacherless writing class," the students were instructed to come together to share their

own writing and to share their feelings and experiences about others' writing. The goal was for the writer to come as close as possible to being able to see and experience his own words through other people. Group members were not to evaluate the writing during the first-draft conferences but to listen and give suggestions based on their reactions to the paper. Following is an example of how this idea played out in the conversations:

Tom: [reads informative essay, "Lake is Being Taken Over by Deer"]
Kate: Ok, but what do you want them [city officials] to do? Do you want them [deer] locked up or
Tom: NO! I want them to trap the deer, take them out to an open space and kill them.
Ellen: Then say that.
Kate: Yeah
Tom: But obviously if I put so many reasons for that and I only put three reasons for the other thing.
Kate: But no one is going to know what you want to do if you don't put it.
Casey: We are just saying how WE didn't get it.
Ellen: Yeah
Tom: And I am trying to say that you should get it.
Casey: Well, we are saying to change it so we do get it.
Tom: Well, how do I change it?

In this conversation, the group members' first reaction was confusion. All three members were unclear what Tom's plan was to resolve the problem of an over-abundance of deer in Lake (a small community). Kate responded first and asked, "But what do you want them [city officials] to do? Tom responded but then questioned the need for stating his plan directly. He felt his views were clear because of the number of reasons he gave for each plan. The three members explained that they "didn't get it." Although Tom was frustrated, in the end he realized that he needed to revise his essay because his message was unclear. By expressing their reaction to the paper, group members worked together to solve a problem in the draft. According to Haneda and Wells (2000), "writing is first and foremost concerned with developing a structure of meaning: the specification of what

one wants to say becomes clearer and more complete in the actual writing and revising of the text for a particular purpose and audience" (p. 432). In transforming the text, one also transforms one's own understanding. This opportunity for reciprocal transformation of self and text is one reason for understanding writing as one of the most effective means of learning.

Table 5.2 Total # of Suggestions and # and % Acted Upon (Informative and Narrative Essays Combined)

Category	Number (%)	# Acted Upon (%)	# Not Acted Upon (%)
Suggestions	165	85 (51%)	81 (49%)
Total Content Suggestions	**126 (76%)**	**68 (58%)**	**49 (42%)**
• Ideas	36 (29%)	17 (47%)	19 (53%)
• Details	35 (28%)	17 (49%)	18 (51%)
• Elaborations	7 (6%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)
• Add/Cut Information	21 (17%)	12 (57%)	9 (43%)
• Vocabulary	17 (13%)	10 (59%)	7 (41%)
• Sequencing	10 (8%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
Total # of Form Suggestions	**23 (14%)**	**10 (45%)**	**12 (55%)**
• Structure	6 (26%)	2 (33%)	4 (67%)
• Title	8 (35%)	5 (63%)	3 (37%)
• Audience	1 (4%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
• Ending	4 (17%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
• Text-Sizing	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
• Transitions	2 (9%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
• Prologue	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
# of Mechanics Suggestions	**16 (9%)**	**8 (50%)**	**8 (50%)**
• Grammar	5 (31%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
• Spelling	8 (50%)	5 (63%)	3 (37%)
• Punctuation	3 (19%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)
# of Procedures	**1 (1%)**	**0 (0%)**	**1 (1%)**

Table 5.2 provides an overview of the suggestions students gave during conferences for both essays. The students acted upon 51% of the suggestions (58% content, 45% form, 50% mechanics). The suggestions the students acted upon changed the final draft because information was added or deleted, elaborated, or clarified. For example, Paul wrote his informative essay on video games. He was given seven suggestions, five content suggestions, one grammar suggestion (unidentified pronoun), and one punctuation suggestion (take out parentheses). The five content suggestions were:

1. New Idea: video games are addictive
2. Add information: add cons
3. Detail: handicapped idea does not fit with sports teams
4. Vocabulary: change children to kids because teenagers are not children
5. Detail: replace the idea of video games improve timing to video games provide challenges and advanced vocabulary

Following is the first paragraph of Paul's first draft followed by the first paragraph of his final draft. (All essays appear as students produced them.)

First Draft:

Line 1: Video games they have entertained use for decades (starting with pong)
Line 2: and 8 out of 10 families have something capable of playing video games.
Line 3: 9 out of 10 children can play video games during week days, but the other
Line 4: ones (including me) aren't able to play because there parents think that
Line 5: they spend to much time on them or don't get enough exercise. Most kids
Line 6: have to differ because they an evolved in sports team, p.e., or is handi-
Line 7: capped.

Final Draft:

Line 1: Video games they have entertained us for decades (starting with pong) and

Line 2: eight out of ten families have machinery capable of playing video games.

Line 3: According to ERIC digest nine out of ten children can play video games

Line 4: during week days, but I the one % who can't because my parents think

Line 5: that I spend too much time on video games and don't get enough exercise.

Line 6: I have to have to say differently because I am evolved in a sports team and

Line 7: P.E.

The following suggestions were acted upon: the pronoun them was replaced with video games (Line 5) and handicapped was omitted (Line 7). Two new paragraphs were added to the essay, a paragraph about the cons (addictive, a waste of time, violent, [inappropriate] language and content) and a closing paragraph. The idea of addiction was used in the third paragraph; Paul wrote, "My parents said, 'That video games are addictive and waste time.'" The revision changes Paul made indicate that suggestions from his writing group members positively influenced the readability and content of his final draft. The change from them to video games made the language more explicit and the deletion of the word handicapped helped clear up a confusing idea. In addition, the addition of the various cons and the addition of the closing paragraph made the paper meet the form and content requirements of the essay (include background information on the topic, present both sides of the issues, and include a closing paragraph in which your views are presented).

Although not a direct suggestion another influence on the final draft was a discussion the group members had during the conference. In the second paragraph of Paul's essay, he listed the benefits of video games: they provide challenging puzzles, teach advanced vocabulary, build accuracy, improve anticipation and timing, build finger muscles, offer entertainment, and teach responsibility. During the conference the following conversation occurred:

> Tara: Yeah, you have to build up finger muscles but where do we use finger muscles?
> Kris: Eating, writing, or uh
> Jack: Yeah, sometimes in writing
> Paul: When you play basketball
> Kris: Yeah, true
> Paul: Piano and guitar
> Tara: Yeah, but would you actually be playing video games instead of the guitar?
> Paul: No, no, no. I would do it on the weekends…But if you [are] planning to be a gymnastics person, holding on to those rings. And you know in movies where they are hanging from those building? That's using finger muscles trying to keep yourself up.

In Paul's final draft, he included the sentence, "Pressing the buttons builds finger mussels (how else do you think Arnold Shwarzenneger can pull all the triggers on the guns in the Terminator I, II, III)." Did the Terminator idea germinate in the conference? According to Ray (1999), "sharing work provides the opportunity for students to learn what other writers are interested in by hearing what other writers write about, thus, expanding one's own repertoire of topics." In Paul's case, he didn't listen to other writing, but he picked up on his group member's interest in the idea of building finger muscles and elaborated the idea with an eye-catching example with roots that can be traced back to a conference conversation. This revision exemplifies why classroom talk is so important; it provides

opportunities for students to be exposed to a multitude of ideas, and ideas are to a writer what flour is to a baker. They are the foundation for good writing. The finger muscle conversation provided the seed for Paul to showcase his humorous voice.

Note in lines two and three of the final draft that the numbers have been changed from numerals to words. In line 2 the word, "something" has been replaced with the more specific word, "machinery." Also note in line 3 that the source of his fact has been cited. Citing sources, punctuating numerals, and using precise vocabulary were mini-lessons that occurred during the writing of the informative essay. These revisions support Dahl's contention that instructional context strongly influences how students conference with a peer.

Reasons Suggestions Were Not Incorporated

Peer group member suggestions, conference discussions, and mini-lessons were three activities that influenced writing. There were also several factors that swayed students to not act on suggestions (Paul did not act on two of the seven suggestions. As cited in the above chart, 49% of the suggestions were not acted upon.) One, group members were aware that the suggestions were just that, suggestions. Carl made this point clear during the informative conference when his group was engaging in a heated debate over the suggestion to add a con to the paper; "Just because she suggests it doesn't mean you have to put it in." Secondly, according to the student survey students didn't act upon suggestions for a variety of reasons: not enough time to make changes, additional research was not located, part of the essay that the suggestion pertained to was not included in the final draft, a suggestion did not make sense to the writer, a suggestion was too difficult to incorporate, or a writer disagreed with the suggestion. Several students

expressed the idea that the suggestion was too difficult to incorporate. When given the suggestion to add more technical vocabulary, Jeff expressed his reluctance, "I didn't write different words because it is hard for me to use new words." Tara expressed a similar feeling, "I didn't use the suggestion of examples because I didn't know where to put them, and I only had one. I was also afraid I would put it in the wrong place and mess it up."

The most common reason given for not acting on a suggestion was a difference of opinion. For example, Lee suggested that Susan make her first sentence shorter, but Susan reasoned, "I didn't do what Lee said because I did that [long sentence] on purpose." Kris also emphasized the importance of choice, "I didn't use the first sentence because I wanted to keep the word guarantee in my paper." The problem of hurting one's feelings if a suggestion was not used did not arise. Instead, the students took on a sense of agency or empowerment when deciding if they would act upon a suggestion. According to Dewey (1966), one of the goals of collaborative learning is to prepare students for "liberation." This goal is accomplished by developing a social context in which democratic communities encourage the "citizens" to achieve independence of thought and the freedom to express it responsibly within the confines of the greater social good. In the eyes of the students, the writing groups were democratic communities, and they felt free to accept or deny a suggestion.

Finally, another contributing factor to the number of suggestions used was an organizational or procedural dilemma. In an attempt to keep the conversation flowing naturally and to promote the feeling of having a conversation about one's writing versus completing a task, explicit directions were not given on how to keep track of suggestions.

Two problems were noted with this approach, however. One, students would engage in conversations about an essay and make suggestions, but then after all of the students presented, students would realize they could not remember the suggestions they were given. In the following exchange Tom could not recall his suggestions:

Tom: Oh yeah, what were the six suggestions that you gave me?
Ellen: I forgot
Kate: I don't remember.
Tom: I only remember getting two.
Ellen: Oh yeah, you need to put why you should…

In the narrative conferences the instructional glitch was addressed, but a perfect solution was not found. Some groups tried writing suggestions on index cards; other groups wrote the suggestions on their drafts; others wrote the suggestions in their writing logs. But despite the attempt to keep track of the suggestions, students still reported that sometimes they just forgot. The second problem was that periodically students would pose a suggestion through a question. A response would be given but not incorporated in the final draft. For example, after Ellen read her essay, Skating in Lake, the following exchange occurred:

Kate: I have a question. Ellen, I have a question. So when you said add an ice rink there would be two of them?
Ellen: Probably, two big things of ice.
Kate: Why?
Ellen: It is just easier that way. Like if they had a hockey tournament it would have it on one rink and then if ice skaters had to practice they would go on the other rink.

When Ellen was questioned about not including the explanation in her essay, she explained that she had given an explanation to her group. She did not remember that the purpose of the conference was to improve her paper!

One of the most important lessons the students learned from the peer writing conferences was that writing is not an exact science. The idea was reinforced by the fact that the writing group's rubric grade was weighted equally with the teacher's grade, but the idea was also reinforced when students saw a stretch of writing differently. This phenomenon was especially evident when students judged how suspenseful a narrative was. Paul thought gory details made a story suspenseful; Kris commented, "You may not like it, but I thought it [Paul's narrative] was a little too boring. I don't' care about bloody stuff."

Frequency of Suggestions for Informative and Narrative Essays

Quantitatively the difference between the total number of suggestions given for each essay was negligible (84-informative, 82-narrative), but qualitatively the students perceived that it was easier to help each other with the informative essay, and they were less sensitive to the suggestions given during the informative essay conferences. When asked the questions, "If given a choice between working with a group for the informative or narrative essay which essay would you choose?" nineteen of twenty students voted for the informative essay. Lily explained, "I think it's like you can help check the facts or add more facts [referring to informative essay], but it's harder to put things in, put things out [narrative essay] because they can help you, but it is harder because you have to follow their [writer's] imagination, and you can't really use your own. Like if you are thinking of one house, and they are thinking of another house, it will be really confusing." Kyle made the same point, "…persuasive is like an essay more that you are trying to write to make it better and this [narrative] is like a story, and they can't give ideas for the story. They just correct it." Carl added, "Also because it [narrative] is more

freehand because you don't have to make it a certain way because it is just a story about you; you just have to have one topic to make it anything."

The numbers supported the students' feelings (see Table 5.3). Thirty-eight percent of the informative content suggestions were ideas compared to seventeen percent for the narrative essay. Conversely, more detail suggestions were given for the narrative (37%) compared to only twenty percent for the informative. The suggestion to add/cut information varied greatly, 19 for the informative, 2 for the narrative.

Both the numerical data and the qualitative data (student interviews) are in line with the findings that Sweigart (1991) found in his study of fifty-eight, college preparatory twelfth grade students and their English teacher. In the study, Sweigart explored whether exploratory talk in small groups can help students assimilate new information on complex topics more effectively than can participation in a class discussion or a lecture. The results indicated that participating in small group discussions was the most beneficial to the students as they prepared to write and the quality of the students' analysis/opinion papers were judged as superior after participating in small group discussion. The quality of a summary paper did not improve after participation. Sweigart's findings were consistent with Hillocks's (1986) assertion that summary writing is less complex and less analytic writing and thus would not benefit from exploratory talk. If you consider Kyle's comment, "persuasive is like an essay more that you are trying to write to make it better and this [narrative] is like a story…" and Carl's comments that the narrative is more freehand because you don't have to make it a certain way," you can presume that the students saw the informative essay as more complex and

the narrative as less analytic. Therefore, the student's opinions (nineteen out of twenty) supported Hillock's assertion as well.

When asked, "If given a choice between working with a group for the informative or narrative essay, which essay would you choose?" Tom was the lone voice for the narrative essay, "…because with the narrative you made up stuff so you would probably need more help than on that [informative] because when you get stuff off the internet you don't have to really make sure like you don't have to read over it and everything and make sure it's good because you know the person who made it up on the internet already did that." Tom's opinion is important because it represents a perspective many students held despite the fact that when forced to make a choice between receiving help for the informative essay or the narrative, nineteen of the twenty students responded the informative. For example, the other three members in Tom's group voted for the informative essay, but when asked "Did the group function differently when working with your narrative than when you were working with the informative?" all four students responded affirmatively. Tom elaborated, "Sequencing like on the narrative and in a persuasive its just information." Kate added, "And there were a lot of things on the [narrative] rubric that we had never done too."

When not forced to make a choice, all twenty students acknowledged that they benefited from conferencing for both essays. Kyle explained that the writing group helped his grade because they gave, "more suggestions. Much more than a teacher because lots of time a teacher will say, 'I can't help you; it is your thing.'" From another perspective Carl commented, "It [writing group] helped us because of all the different points of view, how other people see it. They gave different suggestions on how to make

it better." Jack added, "Writing groups help because we learn each other's strengths and weaknesses and so…" It is the students' feeling that both conferences helped but in different ways as pointed out by Tom. Tom's comment also explains the differences in the quantitative data for the content subcategories. For example, there were 26 idea suggestions given for the informative essay and only 10 for the narrative. There were zero sequencing suggestions for the informative but 10 sequencing suggestions for the narrative. Fourteen detail suggestions were given for the informative essay compared to 21 for the narrative essay. The number of form suggestions also varied significantly between the two genres, 8 for informative and 15 for narrative, but again the difference was attributed to the nature of the genre. Seven of the 15 narrative suggestions were title suggestions, and the informative essay did not have creative titles. Taking this fact into account, then the number of form suggestions would be equal. In conclusion, variation in the type of suggestion given can be attributed to the requirements of each genre and students' perceptions about these genres.

Another cause for the content suggestion differences was the students' feelings about accepting suggestions for each type of essay. Beth stated emphatically, "No, [suggestions did] not [bother me] with my persuasive but with a story that I used my imagination because I don't like people correcting me because it is my imagination, and since if they don't get it, it is the way I like it, and I'm like no, I am keeping it this way, and they like no uhuh. I'm keeping it this way, and if you have a problem with it, too bad." Peter simply stated, "You got it [ideas/facts] from other people; it wasn't your mistake [be]cause it was other people's ideas to express. Assuming that students did not

want to “step on toes,” only two suggestions were given to cut or add information to the narrative essays but nineteen such suggestions were given for the informative essay.

Table 5.3 Frequency of Suggestions for Informative and Narrative Essays

Comparison	Informative	Narrative
Total # of Suggestions	**84**	**82**
# of Content Suggestions	**69 (83%)**	**57 (70%)**
• Sequencing	0 (0%)	10 (17%)
• Ideas	26 (38%)	10 (17%)
• Details	14 (20%)	21 (37%)
• Elaborations	2 (3%)	5 (9%)
• Add/Cut Information	19 (28%)	2 (4%)
• Vocabulary	8 (11%)	9 (16%)
# of Form Suggestions	**8 (8%)**	**15 (18%)**
• Structure	4 (50%)	2 (13%)
• Title	1 (13%)	7 (47%)
• Audience	1 (13%)	0 (0%)
• Ending	2 (25%)	2 (13%)
• Text sizing	0 (0%)	1 (7%)
• Transitions	0 (0%)	2 (13%)
• Prologue	0 (0%)	1 (7%)
# of Mechanics Suggestions	**6 (7%)**	**10 (12%)**
• Grammar	3 (50%)	2 (20%)
• Spelling	2 (33%)	6 (60%)
• Punctuation	1 (17%)	2 (20%)
# of Procedures	**1 (1%)**	**0 (0%)**

A point to consider from the preceding chart’s data was that students are more sensitive to narrative suggestions. (Note that only two suggestions were given to add or cut information to the narrative, but nineteen add/cut suggestions were given for the informative narrative.) The students definitely had a more personal involvement with the narrative. The only personal involvement surrounding the informative essays was the debate that the all-male writing group, Russ, Jeff, Michael, and Peter, had over the issue of motorcycle safety versus car safety. The discussion became heated because the boys

saw the issue from different perspectives, but there was no animosity about suggestions. In fact, the only suggestion given for this topic was to get more research. Bruffee (1985) asserts that "peer criticism is first of all a learning process" (p. 142). Lensmire (2000) views peer writing groups as an opportunity for social interactions that can support and inspire, but these social interactions are also openings for conflict and risk. This issue will be given further attention in the discussion on group evolution and diversity in Chapter Six.

Suggestion Usage for Informative and Narrative Essays

Quantitatively the pattern of usage for the informative and narrative essay did not differ significantly; fifty-four percent of the suggestions were acted upon in the informative essay compared to forty-nine percent in the narrative essay. The types of suggestions also did not vary greatly. Informative suggestions acted upon per category were as follows: 82%--content, 9% form, 9% mechanics; narrative suggestions acted upon per category were: 75% content, 15% form, 10% mechanics. The slight differences can be attributed to the influence of the mini-lessons. For example, no sequencing suggestions were given in the informative conferences but eight were given in the narrative conferences because the concept of sequencing was not introduced until the narrative essay. In a mini-lesson, the teacher introduced the concept of sequencing by explaining that actions should be the natural result of a previous cause. Then using information from student essays, a cause-effect chain was created. An example from Alice's narrative essay follows:

Because Clarese was sitting in her squeaky rocking chair at home she saw something out her window.

Because she saw something out her window, she shut the window, grabbed her cell phone, and ran into an emergency room.
Because there was a small crack in the emergency room door, she could see a zombie.

As the students worked to create a cause and effect chain for their narrative, they found gaps in their stories. As a result of the mini-lesson, major gaps in the plotlines were eliminated, but in the narrative conferences, students also found small detailed gaps. Jack was questioned about where he got a metal pan he used to ward off some beetles because the pan magically appeared in his hand. In Ellen's narrative, Casey discovered that Ellen blacked out and then began screaming. Ellen had not included that she woke up before she started screaming.

Two other minor differences between genres occurred in the content category. First, more ideas (30% informative, 20% narrative) were acted upon, and second more information was added or cut (30% informative, 3% narrative) in the informative essay than in the narrative essay. These numerical data correspond to the students' feeling that the narrative essay content was drawn from their own imaginations and therefore perceived as more sacred than information taken from resources. Therefore, students were more reluctant to change their narrative essays.

In the form category there were slightly more narrative suggestions acted upon (4-informative, 6- narrative), but the important fact to note is that the types of suggestions given differed. Suggestions given for the informative essay included structure (add a pro/con section), audience (think about who will be reading this essay), and endings (Don't put bye, the end). Narrative essay suggestions consisted of structure (move the idea of a dream to the ending), title (suggestions for creative titles) and transitions (sequencing). Again, these differences can be attributed to the focus of the mini-lessons

and the genre. For example, to prepare to write the informative essay, the students looked at models from *Time for Kids* magazines. The articles were set up in two sections. One section included background information and the second section contained pros and cons about the issue. As a consequence of this activity, Peter suggested to Russ to add a "Yes/No" section. For the narrative essay the structure suggestion that Jeff received was to move his lead to the end of the story. In an attempt to justify his suggestion, Michael referred to the model, *The House of Dies Drear*, which the students studied in preparation for their narrative. Therefore, one can conclude that the types of suggestions given and subsequently acted upon are dependent on a student's knowledge base which is enhanced through mini-lessons. (There were no significant mechanical or procedural differences.)

Table 5.4 Suggestion Usage for Informative and Narrative Essays

Comparison	**Informative** # of Suggestions Acted Upon (%)	**Narrative** # Acted Upon (%)
Total Suggestions **(N = 84 suggestions for informative)** **(N = 82 suggestions for narrative)**	**45/84 (54%)**	**40/82 (49%)**
Total Content Suggestions **(N = 45 acted upon suggestions for informative)** **(N = 40 acted upon suggestions of narrative)**	**37/45 (82%)**	**30/40 (75%)**
• Sequencing (N = 37 acted upon content suggestions for informative) (N = 30 acted upon content suggestions for narrative)	0/37 (0%)	8/30 (27%)
• Ideas	11/37 (30%)	6/30 (20%)
• Details	9/37 (24%)	8/30 (27%)
• Elaborations	2/37 (5%)	1/30 (3%)
• Add/Cut Information	11/ 37 (30%)	1/30 (3%)
• Vocabulary	4/37 (11%)	6/30 (20%)

Total Form Suggestions **(N = 45 acted upon suggestions for informative)** **(N = 40 acted upon suggestions of narrative)**	**4/45 (9%)**	**6/40 (15%)**
• Structure N = 4 acted upon form suggestions for informative N = 6 acted upon form suggestions for narrative	2/4 (50%)	0/6 (0%)
• Title	0/4 (0%)	4/6 (67%)
• Audience	1/4 (25%)	0/6 (0%)
• Ending	1/4 (25%)	0/6 (0%)
• Text Sizing	0/4 (0%0	0/6 (0%0
• Transitions	0/4 (0%)	2/6 (33%)
• Prologue	0/4 (0%)	0/6 (0%)
Total Mechanics Suggestions **(N = 45 acted upon suggestions for informative)** **(N = 40 acted upon suggestions of narrative)**	**4/45 (9%)**	**4/40 (10%)**
• Grammar N = 4 mechanics suggested acted upon for informative and narrative	1/4 (25%)	1/4 (25%)
• Spelling	2/4 (50%)	3/4 (75%)
• Punctuation	1/4 (25%)	0/4 (0%)
Total Procedure Suggestions **(N = 45 acted upon suggestions for informative)** **(N = 40 acted upon suggestions of narrative)**	**0/45 (0%)**	**0/45 (0%)**

The suggestions usage data reinforce the idea that students give suggestions based on their knowledge base which is built through mini-lessons (see Table 5.4). Jack extended this idea, "I've learned many techniques such as hyperboles. I guess some of the techniques came from mini-lessons, but my group helped me understand [them] better." Jack brought up a very important point; during the peer conferences, students learned from each other. According to Lave & Wenger (1991), in a collaborative

classroom the students are viewed not simply as a collection of individuals but also as a community that works toward shared goals. Learning is not dependent on deliberate instruction according to a set of reformulated objectives but instead students contribute to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties according to their current ability to do so; at the same time they provide support and assistance for each other. Furthermore, it is not necessarily the most expert members of the group who are the most helpful in providing assistance; students with relatively little expertise can learn with and from each other as well as from those with greater experience. Following is an example of learning; the conversation took place during the discussion of Paul's essay on video games during the informative first draft conference.

Jack: What does timing mean?
Paul: Like if you are playing dodge ball and you had George running like this and you were standing here, you wouldn't throw it straight at him because he would be moving so you would go behind him.
Jack: Oh
Kris: like waiting
Paul: You would throw it in front of him, and it would hit him.
Jack: Oh yeah, now I get it.

Students taught each other vocabulary words; punctuation rules; grammar rules, such as the use of first and third person; explained things, such as why an ice rink would have two skating areas; and introduced new ideas, such as riding a motorcycle with a leather jacket can reduce injury. Bouton and Rice (1983) contend that "the integration of skills with content not only results in the joint development of higher and lower order skills but also vastly improves students' mastery of course content. In writing classes… the reciprocity of composition and group interaction similarly improves learning" (p. 32). In

this study students composed compositions and then discussed them. Discussing their writing provided opportunities for the students to learn from each other.

Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestions
Informative and Narrative Essays Combined

In this discussion only five groups will be considered; data for Jill, Kyle, Carl, and Alice's group is incomplete due to technical difficulties that occurred during the narrative conference, and therefore, will not be considered.

According to Mercer (2000), "talk between learners has been shown to be valuable for the construction of knowledge. Joint activity provides opportunities for practicing and developing ways of reasoning with language…"(p. 98). But the research also shows that not all talk is of equal educational value. In order for talk to solve intellectual problems and advance understanding, group members must present ideas clearly and explicitly so that the ideas can be shared and jointly evaluated. Members must reason together—analyze problems jointly, compare possible explanations, and reach joint decisions. Judging or evaluating the groups using Mercer's criteria, two categories emerged. In one category were the groups in which the students reasoned together and provided detailed and explicit suggestions. The second group reasoned together but provided only sketchy or global suggestions such as "do more research." Using Mercer's criteria the groups would be placed accordingly:

2 Explicit Groups: Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate
Tara, Paul, Jack, Kris

3 General Groups: Beth, Joe, Lily, Bill
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff
Susan, George, Brad, Lee

Following is a sample of the talk characteristic of each categorical group:

Explicit Group:
Tom, Ellen, Casey, and Kate are working on Kate's letter to her parents asking them for a ferret.

Table 5.5 Sample of Talk from an Explicit Group

Speaker	**Line**	**Comment**
Tom	You don't have an interesting fact.	Statement of problem
Ellen	Yeah, you could say how long they live.	Working together to elaborate idea. Ellen gives a specific suggestion.
Tom	Yeah, how long do they live?	Questions in an attempt to add to suggestion
Kate	I don't know.	Response
Tom	Look it up. If it something like three years then you could say I am only going to have one for three years. It's not like…	Elaborates suggestion with specific example.

General Group:
Beth, Bill, Lily, and Joe are reviewing Beth's informative essay on Gun Control.

Table 5.6 Sample of Talk from a General Group

Speaker	Line	Comment
Bill	I think you should have gotten more detail about the part where it said a little girl…there was a little story in there I forgot	Identifies problem
Beth	Oh, a woman has guns	Clarifies point in story
Bill	Yeah, I think you should put more detail	Confirms that the section of concern has been identified with his affirmation, yeah. No further conversation ensues about the suggestion. The next comment is about another problem.
Joe	You know you put is it safe that sometimes a baby will get a gun and don't know what it is?	Identifies another problem.

There is a marked difference between the two categories of groups in suggestion usage.

In the explicit category the two writing groups acted upon 77% and 65% of the given

suggestions. In the general group, 48%, 37%, and 33% of the suggestions were acted upon.

Table 5.7 Suggestions Acted Upon: Explicit Groups

Explicit Groups	Total Suggestions	Acted Upon (%)	Not Acted Upon (%)
Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate	30	23 (77%)	7 (23%)
Tara, Jack, Kris, Paul	37	24 (65%)	13 (35%)

Table 5.8 Suggestions Acted Upon: General Groups

General Groups	Total Suggestions	Acted Upon %	Not Acted Upon (0%)
Beth, Joe, Bill, Lily	23	11 (48%)	11 (48%)
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff	27	9 (33%)	18 (67%)
Susan, Lee, George, Brad	41	15 (37%)	26 (63%)

The data confirm Mercer's belief that for talk to be useful, it must be explicit. When the group provided detailed examples of how to incorporate a suggestion, the likelihood that the suggestion would be incorporated was increased. In their study of how talk can lead to better writing, Wells and Wells (1992) found that when students collaborate to solve a problem, they must achieve intersubjectivity, or in other words, they must make their ideas and proposals known and understood by the other person. In doing this, the student not only makes himself more explicit (this occurred when Ellen suggested to say how long ferrets live) but usually comes to understand more clearly himself the ideas that he is proposing because often his ideas will be challenged and he must justify his reasoning. One means of justification is through building connections between a new idea and a previous idea. (In the ferret discussion the new idea of using longevity of life as a pro and con was added to the idea of talking about how long a ferret lives which is an interesting fact.) Thus, through the process of collaborative talk, the students practiced being explicit, making connections, and justifying their opinions or ideas. These features are precisely the sort of attributes that are held to be characteristic of written discourse.

Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestions Informative and Narrative Data Not Combined

Data will not be compared for Jill, Alice, Carl, and Kyle's group because the entire narrative first draft conference did not tape. Each group gave approximately the same number of suggestions for each essay except for Susan, Lee, Brad, and George's group. A close examination of the data revealed that during the informative conference, the students gave Lee fifteen suggestions compared to five for Susan and four for Brad. No suggestions were given to George. Lee wrote about girls playing football. There was a long discussion about the topic which resulted in many suggestions. In the narrative conference Lee received seven suggestions, George five, and Susan and Brad each received two suggestions. Therefore, quantitatively there appears to be a large discrepancy, but the difference can be attributed to the interest in the topic and not necessarily the genre itself.

Of the five groups being compared, four of the groups acted upon fewer suggestions for the narrative essay than the informative essay. This numerical fact reinforced the students' feelings that the narrative draft was drawn from their own imaginations, and therefore the students were less willing to make changes. The one group that did act upon more suggestions for the narrative draft was Russ, Michael, Peter, and Jeff's group. Of the six suggestions that were acted upon two were title suggestions, one was a vocabulary suggestion, and three were suggestions for Peter. One of Peter's suggestions was to redo his entire essay; sequencing problems and the lack of a setting were noted. When Peter rewrote his essay, the three suggestions were acted upon. Note that two of the suggestions were explicit, add a setting and fix the time frames.

Table 5.9 Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestions Informative and Narrative Data Not Combined

Group	**Persuasive** # of Suggestions	**Narrative** # of Suggestions	**Persuasive** #, % Acted Upon	**Narrative** #, % Acted Upon	**Persuasive** #, % Not Acted Upon	**Narrative** #, % Not Acted Upon
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff	12	15	3 (25%)	6 (40%)	9 (75%)	9 (60%)
Susan, Lee, Brad, George	25	16	11 (44%)	4 (25%)	14 (56%)	12 (75%)
Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate	12	18	10 (84%)	13 (72%)	2 (17%)	5 (28%)
Tara, Jack, Kris, Paul	19	18	13 (68%)	11 (61%)	6 (32%)	7 (39%)
Beth, Bill, Joe, Lily	11	12	7 (64%)	4 (33%)	4 (36%)	8 (67%)

From the data (four of the five groups acted upon fewer suggestions for the narrative essay) one assumption that can be drawn is personal connection with the subject matter can influence the number of suggestions acted upon. This theme is consistent with the findings in a study conducted by Lawson, Holt, and Newell (as cited in Spear, 1988) that explored freshman attitudes toward questions of personal value and academic standards of evaluation. Interview data showed that students resented challenges, questions, and especially evaluations of work that contained opinions and beliefs. One student wrote:

> When they send back comments, a lot of papers are based on values and stuff that are a lot of your own opinions, and I have a hard time seeing how they could grade some of your own opinions. Writing style, maybe, technique, or misspelled words, but… (p. 26).

Like the fifth-grade students, the freshman in the study felt that facts are subject to error and correction but "values and stuff" are personal matters, and evaluating them is a reflection of subjective bias and not appropriate.

Findings from Student Survey Data

Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestions Informative and Narrative Essays Combined

The data for Table 5.10 was collected from the two student surveys. In the informative survey the students were asked to list all of the suggestions they were given and then to select two suggestions, one they used and one they did not use and explain their choices. The narrative survey consisted of only explaining two suggestions. The "no comment" category lists the informative suggestions that were not selected for explanation. For the informative essay five students (Tom, George, Alice, Carl, and Jack) reported that they used all suggestions. Four students (Jill, Kyle, George, and Kris) reported that they used all the narrative suggestions. All of the groups, with the exception of the all-male group, acted upon more suggestions than they did not act upon.

Table 5.10 Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestions Informative and Narrative Essays Combined

Group	**Total Suggestions**	**Acted Upon (%)**	**Not Acted Upon (%)**	No Comment
Jill, Kyle, Carl, Alice	22	17 (77%)	3 (14%)	2 (9%)
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff	18	6 (33%)	10 (56%)	2 (11%)
Susan, Lee, George, Brad	18	8 (44%)	5 (28%)	5 (28%)
Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate	19	10 (53%)	7 (37%)	2 (10%)
Tara, Jack, Kris, Paul	13	8 (62%)	5 (38%)	0 (0%)
Beth, Joe, Bill, Lily	13	7 (54%)	6 (46%)	0 (0%)

These data suggest that writing groups positively influenced the writing experience. They encouraged revision by providing suggestions for improvement and enhanced the idea of writing as an interactive process. When remarking on their participation in writing

groups students made both positive and negative comments. The positive comments focused on group members giving ideas and suggestions, on the improvement of their essays because of the help they received from their peers, and on the camaraderie of the interaction. (The number of students who responded in each category is listed in parentheses.)

- Group members provided ideas. (19 of 24 students)

  Kyle: "I didn't really have an idea yet [for the informative essay]. They [writing group members] helped me find one. It's like I couldn't think of something at first…I couldn't find any research on if kids should sit anywhere so I thought maybe I shouldn't do that, but they gave me some ideas which I felt I could research and do and how to do it."

- Group members give helpful suggestions (All 24 students)

  Alice: "We talk about how we can put writing techniques in it [essay]. And like elaborate more and just…"

  Michael: "Groups are an excellent idea because most people don't catch their own mistakes."

- Group member's help resulted in grade improvement (All responded that their writing improved because of their writing group. Eight students specifically mentioned grade improvement.)

  Beth commented, "If we didn't have writing groups I probably would get 76s." (Beth's grades ranged from the mid-eighties to the low nineties.)

- The writing group experience created a bond between the students. (23 of 24 students)

George: “I like working with them [writing group] because they are my friends, and we get along with each other.”

Russ: “I think [our] group was awesome and how we worked together was really good.”

Kris: “I think that every teacher should do writing groups because they can be helpful, and they’re fun to be in.”

The negative comment that was mentioned more than once concerned students being off-task or unprepared. (9 of 24 students)

Student interview:

Teacher:	What would you like to talk about?
Jill:	Well, some people in my group do nothing and are off topic a lot.
Teacher:	Who?
Jill:	Like he [Carl] never does anything; he just watches. Everyone else is trying to do the rubric.
Teacher:	So really just one [student is off-task]. What else?
Jill:	Well, like they forget their writing at home when you are supposed to bring it.
Teacher:	Who?
Jill:	…Carl and sometimes Alice.
Teacher:	All right, so sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. Do you still think it is worthwhile to have a group?
Jill:	yeah

Other negative comments that appeared only once were:

- Ellen: “Sometimes they [writing group members] interrupt and I hate that because my sister does that all the time. And I hate that because sometimes when I am talking they interrupt me, and I am trying to say my idea....”
- Brad: When asked if he felt frustrated when his group members did not act upon his suggestions he replied, “A little.”

- Tom mentioned the problem of depending too much on group members to catch mistakes.

These negative comments are important from a teacher's perspective because they portray issues that should be discussed in an attempt to resolve them. (The issues would make excellent topics for additional talk lessons.) One should note, however, that the nine students that mentioned problems all stated affirmatively that they wanted to participate in writing groups again the following year. The problems mentioned hindered the learning process but did not halt it. From a researcher's perspective they were insignificant because they did not interrupt the data collection process or significantly alter the findings in a noticeable manner.

All of the groups, with the exception of the all-male group, worked well together with limited supervision. Kris complained about Paul's off-task behavior and Jill singled out Carl for being both off task and unprepared and Alice for being unprepared, but the problems were solved by the group members. (The problems that the all-male group encountered were discussed in chapter four.) Without direct instruction from the teacher, the students set up the recording equipment and commenced with the task of conferencing. The students took turns reading their essays. After a student read, comments and suggestions were given. (Sometimes the comments and suggestions came during the reading.) The group dynamics were based on Slavin's (1987) work on collaborative learning. Slavin found that it is the combination of group rewards based on group members' individual learning and peer interaction on learning tasks that is necessary to produce learning gains. As such, each individual group member's conferencing grade was an average of each member's final essay grade. This fact did not

appear to have any influence on any of the groups except for the all-male group. On several occasions a reference was made to the group grade. In the informative conference the following exchange occurred:

Russ: Start the first draft, Jeff.
Michael: Jeff, you have a topic that is easy to write about.
Russ: So start it up.
Peter: We want to get a good group grade.

In the narrative conference after a very long discussion in which Jeff refused to act upon the suggestion to change his lead, Michael comments, "He's not going to get a bad grade because not many stories have suspense in them." In the all-male group the fact that each person's final grade was going to affect each individual's conferencing grade appeared to give rise to the feeling that the group suggestions must be taken. In the other five groups in which the issue of the group grade never surfaced the feeling was similar to what Carl expressed, "Just because she suggests it doesn't mean you have to put it in."

In the student interviews and surveys the students reported to have the type of relationship that Ladson-Billings (1994) supported; in such classrooms students are responsible for monitoring one another's academic work and personal behavior and for solving group problems. Group members may talk with one another and provide academic assistance. The students assumed the job of monitoring each other's academic work and personal behavior seriously; disorganization was admonished and off-task behavior and talk was squelched. Examples follow:

Sample taken from First Draft Informative conference:

Alice: Well, Carl doesn't have his paper. Naughty, naughty boy.
Carl: That's because I did until Roxanne lost it someway.
Jill: Don't blame it on Roxanne.
Carl: She put her papers on mine and took it with her. She did.

Jill: Carl, it wasn't her fault; you are blaming.

Sample taken from Informative Rubric Conference:

Carl: She described a lot, had a lot of facts, both sides of the issues. I think she should get advanced. This is a little bit off the subject but when my brother was in DARE.
Jill: YOU ARE OFF TASK!
Kyle: That's not off task; let him say. Go ahead and say it.
Jill: Kyle, that is off task.
Carl: The cops handcuffed my brother; that's all.

Sample taken from student interview:

Paul: I want to talk about my writing group. I think they are fun and really easy to work with; they are really helpful and give me a lot of suggestions like they told me to add another side to my persuasive paper.
Mrs. B: Because you had just presented one side?
Paul: And they uh they tell me if I am getting to rowdy and stuff.
Mrs. B: And do you get rowdy sometimes?
Paul: Yeah
Mrs. B: And who tells you?
Paul: Either Kris or Tara and sometimes Jack.
Mrs. B: So they all do. Does that ever hurt your feelings?
Paul: No

The only group with a significant amount of off-task talk was the all-male group and even in that group the talk was usually limited to the beginning and end of each conference; Russ would sing for the group and tell bathroom jokes.

Comparison between Groups of Frequency and Usage of Suggestion
Informative and Narrative Essays Not Combined

When looking at the composite of suggestions acted upon for each essay (Table 5.11) there is quantitatively not a significant difference. The largest spread between suggestions acted upon for each genre was ten percent (Beth, Joe, Bill, and Lily's group) and the smallest difference was two percent (Susan, Lee, Brad, and George's group).

Qualitatively the reasons for not acting upon suggestions also did not differ significantly. Students' reasons included that they did not have enough time, already had enough information, made a personal choice, and did not understand the suggestion. These reasons appeared in both the narrative and informative surveys. Two suggestions, could not find research and could not easily incorporate vocabulary or information, only appeared in the informative essay. Comments on titles only appeared in the narrative survey.

Table 5.11 # of Suggestions and % Acted Upon and Not Acted Upon Per Group Informative and Narrative Essays Not Combined

Group	**Informative** # of Suggestions	**Narrative** # of Suggestions	**Informative** #, % Acted Upon	**Narrative** #, % Acted Upon	**Informative** #, % Not Acted Upon	**Narrative** #, % Not Acted Upon	No Com-ment
Jill, Kyle, Carl, Alice	15	7	12 (80%)	5 (71%)	1 (7%)	2 (29%)	2
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff	10	8	3 (30%)	3 (38%)	5 (50%)	5 (63%)	2
Susan, Lee, George, Brad	11	7	5 (45%)	3 (43%)	2 (18%)	3 (43%)	5
Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate	11	8	6 (55%)	4 (50%)	3 (27%)	4 (50%)	2
Tara, Jack, Kris, Paul	6	7	4 (67%)	4 (57%)	2 (33%)	3 (43%)	0
Beth, Joe, Bill, Lily	5	8	3 (60%)	4 (50%)	2 (40%)	4 (50%)	0

Walker and Elias (1987) found that it was not the amount of student participation per se that contributed to tutors' and students' perceptions of successful conferences, but rather joint understanding and articulation of principles of good writing. Although Walker and Elias were referring to teacher-student conferences, their point speaks to peer conferences as well. The students judged a conference to be successful not by the amount of suggestions they contributed or the number of suggestions they acted upon, but by the quality of the group discussion, the compatibleness of the group interaction, and the

suggestions they did act upon. Ellen wrote, “My writing is improving from my group like sometimes in my writing, they [group members] give me an awesome suggestion I would of never thought of. They’ve really helped me think out of the box. My writing is getting more creative everyday because of them.” Alice expressed this view, “I had fun with my writing group, and we became very good friends. They helped me a lot with my writing. I am going to ask my teacher next year if we can have writing groups. Coming from another perspective, Carl adds, “I really think it helps to have writing groups because you get different suggestions from different people.” Michael wrote, “Groups are an excellent idea because most people don’t catch their own mistakes.” In summary, the writing groups were beneficial for both the informative and narrative essays.

Comparison between Transcript Data and Student Survey Data
Total # of Suggestions and % Acted Upon

A comparison between the number of transcript and student survey suggestions is not valid because of the manner in which the survey was administered. The directions for the informative essay directed the students to list the suggestions they were given and then comment on one suggestion that was acted upon and one suggestion that was not acted upon. Because of time constraints, for the narrative survey the students only listed one suggestion they acted upon and one they did not. Therefore, the number of suggestions that were given was not recorded. Also note that because of incomplete data collection, a comparison for Jill, Kyle, Carl, and Alice’s group has not been included.

The percentage of suggestions used as reported in the student survey did not vary significantly from the percentage of used suggestions data taken from the taped writing

conferences (Table 5.12). For four of the five groups the use of suggestions data from the two sources did not differ more than ten percent (transcript percentages/student survey percentages: 33%/33%, 37%/44%, 65%/62%, 48%/54%, 77%/53%). Tom, Ellen, Kate, and Casey's group varied more than ten percent (77% transcript, 53% survey), but interestingly, it was this group that used the highest percentage of suggestions but also worried constantly (the problem of remembering suggestions appeared three times in the informative first draft conference) that they did not accurately record all of their suggestions. It is assumed they also did not remember when completing the surveys all of the suggestions that they did actually act upon.

Table 5.12 Comparison between Transcript Data and Student Survey Data Total # of Suggestions and % Acted Upon

Group	# Suggestions from Transcripts	# Suggestions from Student Survey	% Used Transcripts	% Used Student Survey
Russ, Michael, Peter, Jeff	27	18	9 (33%)	6 (33%)
Susan, Lee, George, Brad	41	18	15 (37%)	8 (44%)
Tom, Ellen, Casey, Kate	30	19	23 (77%)	10 (53%)
Tara, Jack, Kris, Paul	37	13	24 (65%)	8 (62%)
Beth, Joe, Bill, Lily	23	13	11 (48%)	7 (54%)

The data indicated that the students were aware of suggestions they acted upon and suggestions they did not act upon. Very importantly, the students were able to justify their use of suggestions. According to Oakeshott (1962), many of the social forms and conventions of conversation parallel the forms and conventions of reflective thought. Mercer's report of studies (2000) on exploratory talk lends support to Oakeshott's contention because Mercer found that students who developed an exploratory way of using language did better on activities/problems that required rational, justified reasoning. These authors suggest then that the first steps to learning to think better are learning to converse better. The students, in their peer conferences, learned to justify their reasons

for acting upon or not acting upon suggestions. And according to Bruffee (1984) teachers should engage students in conversations among themselves about the reading and writing processes as often as possible, and the talk should be similar to the way in which they eventually want the students to read and write because how students talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way they will write.

The peer conferences provided the opportunity for the students to reflect on and rationalize the decisions they made as writers. For example, Jeff rationalized not using suggestions to improve his vocabulary usage by stating, "I didn't use different words because it is hard for me to use new words." His comment indicated that he was thinking metacognitively. Bill was given the suggestion to shorten his first draft by deleting details. Instead he focused on one event and deleted everything else; the comment by his peers prompted reflection about his writing decisions and in this case Bill revised his essay, although not exactly as his peers suggested. In both situations the students made conscientious decisions; they were thinking like writers. The conversations did not always result in immediate action, but sometimes it resulted in reflection over a long period of time. In the informative survey Kyle wrote, "I did a paper on sit wherever you want at lunch, and I explained why I wanted it, and then I was given a suggestion to talk about table washers. That to me is the second step because you need to figure out if you can do the idea and once that is figured out you can work out table washers and how you're go[ing] to do it." The table washer issue would have been a con, but Kyle did not initially see it that way. Months later Kyle commented, "Most of them [suggestions] I used. There was one or two and now I know I should have used them…" Kyle had continued to reflect on his decision not to use the table washer idea as a con and in the

end realized it was a suggestion that could have been acted upon. The important issue is not whether he acted upon the suggestion or not, but that Kyle continued to reflect on it. The conversation evoked reflection; he was thinking like a writer.

Summary of Findings

From the analyses of the relationship between classroom talk and writing, four conclusions for writing instructors were drawn. One, instructional content (mini-lessons) influenced the type of suggestions the students gave in the writing conference. Dahl (1988) found in her study of a fourth-grade classroom that students "came to expect substantive help from their peers" (p. 173). During the initial ten weeks of the writing workshop, reader-based feedback was given, but in the later period, during which time instruction focused on revision techniques such as adding words that describe, moving or deleting information, working on clarity, and choosing among a variety of leads, feedback was criterion-based and showed learners' growing concern with revision. Thus, instructional context strongly influenced how learners went about conferencing with a peer. In this study, the type of suggestion was directly related to the topics covered in the mini-lessons. For example, the topic, sequencing, was not introduced until the narrative essay and consequently, there were no sequencing suggestions given during the informative first draft conference.

Two, all six groups felt they were helped in both the informative and narrative essays, but the help was different for each genre. In the informative essay 38% of the content suggestions were ideas compared to 17% for the narrative essay. Conversely, only 20% of the content suggestions were details for the informative compared to 37%

for the narrative essay. In the student interview, the students indicated that it was easier to help each other with the informative essay, and they were less sensitive to the suggestions. Lily explained, "I think it's like you can help check the facts or add more facts [referring to informative essay], but it's harder to put things in, put things out [narrative essay] because they can help you, but it is harder because you have to follow their [writer's] imagination, and you can't really use your own. Like if you are thinking of one house, and they are thinking of another house, it will be really confusing." Lily's feelings were consistent with the findings in a study conducted by Lawson, Holt, and Newell (in Spear, 1988). In the study interview data showed that students resented challenges, questions, and especially evaluations of work that contained opinions and beliefs.

Three, both criterion-based feedback and reader-based feedback were useful. In the study, reader-based feedback was given during the first draft conferences. Individual group members would read their essay and then the group members would give suggestions to improve the piece. The students perceived that the suggestions were helpful. In an interview, Beth stated, "If we didn't have writing groups I probably would get 76s (lower grades) because they help me elaborate, but sometimes they don't catch all of my mechanic [mistakes]." In the rubric conferences, students gave criterion-based feedback. Together the teacher and students created a rubric based on the mini-lessons that were taught during the writing of a particular piece of writing. The students used the rubric to judge their work. The structure of the rubric conferences provided the students with the opportunity to defend their writing. Students would point out aspects of their writing that would satisfy a criterion on the rubric or a point out a criterion that was not

met. For example, in the informative rubric conference when Beth asked about writing techniques, Bill said, “I used font sizing. That is one, but I didn’t use onomatopoeia. Bill also pointed out, “I made one mistake; I forgot a period.” Both types of feedback were important; criterion-based feedback opened up the opportunity for students to explain their writing. According to Nystrand (1997), “a central difficulty of learning to write in school is that students rarely get the chance to explain anything to someone who really needs or wants to know” (p. 101). Applebee (1986) observed that when students write for a teacher, they address someone who reads not to be informed but to evaluate. Berkenkotter (1981) concluded, “School writing stifles the development of audience representation because it precludes its necessity” (p. 396).

Reader-based feedback is also needed because it encouraged revision. In studies of peer conferencing, benefits were found for students writing mainly for each other in small groups as compared with students who wrote only for the teacher and spent no time in groups. Nystrand (1986) and Nystrand & Brandt (1989) found that first-year college students who participated in peer conferences showed more improvement in their writing ability than students who only wrote for a teacher. The students’ improvement was attributed mainly to the development of superior revising skills. The students revised more (an average of three times per piece) and developed proofreading skills as they presented their papers orally to their groups. Bartlett (1981) found similar findings working with fifth-graders. In the study, Bartlett examined the revision processes of students who were editing both their own and other writers’ texts and found that when the students were editing their own texts, they were able to find 56% of missing subjects or predicates, but only 10% of faulty referring expressions. In contrast, when the students

were editing the text of other students, they detected 50% of occurrences of each type of problem. In the study, Susan explained, "[Last year] I just forgot a lot of words like the, and, of…Now I usually go over it, and I find stuff, and last year I couldn't find anything when I went over it." She also provided a rationale for the improvement, "I think it helped that I looked over group members' [papers] because it gave me ideas and stuff I shouldn't do." Two other important factors, according to Gere and Stevens (1985), were that when students wrote for each other they addressed discrepancies between what they meant and what their texts actually said, but when students only wrote for their teacher, they treated problems as a discrepancy between their text and some "ideal" text. They also found that students in peer response groups viewed revision as rethinking the purpose of the paper or a part of the paper whereas students who only wrote for their teacher saw revision as correcting the paper. In the peer conferences, the students addressed many discrepancies and "re-viewed" their papers. For example, in the persuasive first draft, Peter wrote an informative essay about gopeds, and the following exchange occurred:

Michael: On your yes column you are putting like yes I think people should have gopeds. You are supposed to be persuading them TO have gopeds.
Peter: I know. I know.
Russ: You just have to add more information
Michael: And say why children shouldn't have gopeds. Say like if they fall off Gopeds, they could get a serious head injury or something.
Russ: Yes, that's why. Say that in your draft.

Peter assumed he had presented the pros and cons of owning a goped when in fact he had only given facts about gopeds. His group members saw the discrepancy and addressed it. As in Dahl's (1988) study, the students in this study "came to expect substantive help from their peers" (p. 173). Kyle expressed this view when he commented, "[Writing

group members gave] more suggestions. Much more than a teacher because lots of time a teacher will say, 'I can't help you; it is your thing.'" The group members came to see their peers as collaborators and helpers. During the informative first draft conference, Lily pleaded, "Guys, like I need some MAJOR help here. I need a stronger ending, one more pro, and one more con." Joe immediately replied, "Oh, I have an idea. I think it might be useful if you tell about the story…" According to Nystrand (1997), "students in peer groups developed more positive attitudes towards writing. This does not mean that the peer group students dealt less with errors and other writing problems; on the contrary, they were more openly critical of their own writing than were the teacher-only writers" (p. 100). As indicated by Lily's comment, the students became aware of the shortcomings in their papers. Perhaps the reason this was so was because, as Susan said, they had the opportunity to read and hear other student's papers and got ideas, both good and bad, from them. According to Ray (1999), "When students are taught to see how writing is done, this way of seeing opens up to them huge warehouses of possibilities for how to make their writing good writing" (p. 11).

Chapter 6

This chapter includes educational implications, limitations of the study, a conversation with educational researchers, and recommendations for future research. The implications' section is separated into implications for educators and for teacher researchers.

Educational Implications

Implications for Educators

The 2003-2004 school-year will be remembered as the year I learned to teach. I learned from my students. I began the school year determined to empower my students by making the usually transparent medium of classroom talk the object of attention. Graves (1994) emphasized the importance of my goal when he stated,

> Unless we [teachers] begin to understand what our students know, how they know it, and what they value about it, we waste their time. Worse, if our students think we don't know something special about them, which they value, they may find learning to be an isolated and meaningless exercise. (p. 27)

What I did not know at the beginning of the school-year was that my students' knowledge would empower me because it helped me overcome a common problem according to Schon (1983), "Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say" (p. viii). Each night, after the students and I had spent the day engaged in the hard work of learning to cooperate with others, learning to communicate effectively, and learning to write, I reflected on the significance of the daily activities. And from my reflective notes and the analyses of the data taken from transcripts of writing conferences, student interviews, and written student surveys, I learned. I learned the importance of

training students how to work collaboratively; I learned the importance of the relationship between talk and writing, and I learned the importance of teacher research. Following is a description of the most (I learned so much I couldn't possibly write about everything) important ideas I learned from the study.

- Students need to be taught how to work collaboratively.

How many times have teachers lamented, "I tried having the students work together, but all they did was goof off." According to Spear (1988), the teachers were correct because she concludes that students must learn the interpersonal skills that make fruitful discussion of writing possible. From the study I found that interpersonal skills must be modeled and reinforced. All students need to understand that each group member is responsible for not only their own success but the success of each group member as well. This is a different idea for many students because often students are rewarded for answering all of the "teacher's questions." In a collaborative classroom, there is not a star; each student must perform. Therefore, each student must not only learn to contribute but must also learn to listen and give other students an opportunity to participate, even if this means slowing down the pace of instruction or the pace of an activity.

- Teachers should take into consideration several factors, gender, academic abilities, and social and/or leadership skills, when forming writing groups.

In the study, mixed-gender groups spent more time on writing tasks and were perceived by the students as better than same-gender groups. Peter, Russ, and Michael, members of an all-male group explained, "Well, I think it [writing group] worked out well, but I think it might have worked out better if there was like Jill [a girl known for keeping all group

members on task] because they [girls] are better at catching mechanics and we [boys] are better at words." The ideas Peter expressed were consistent with several of the factors to be considered when grouping according to Dawes, Mercer, and Wegerif (2000). The findings from this study point to the ideal group as one in which (1) the members have diverse perspectives and experiences, (2) the members have similar academic abilities, and (3) at least one member has leadership skills, like Jill who was able to keep the group on task, and one member who can serve as a mediator (Carl often would point out that the suggestions were to be considered, but it was not mandatory that they be acted upon). All groups eventually learned to work well together, but the same gender groups took a longer time possibly because of the problem that Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif (2000) described, "Friends working together tend to agree with each other's suggestions, without critical consideration" (p. 6).

After the pilot study, the only students who wanted to change groups were members of a group that had two high-ability students and two low-ability students and members of the same-gender groups. The high-ability students perceived that they did not receive sufficient help from the low-ability students. The low-ability students were pleased with the group members. In summary, the groups which exhibited a high level of positive interaction (both academic and behavioral) among the group members were mixed-gendered groups composed of students with similar reading and writing abilities and members with strong leadership and social skills.

- To promote collaborative interactions that produce learning gains, teachers should implement a system in which group rewards are based on the sum of group members' individual learning.

Slavin (1987) looked at collaborative learning from both a behavioral and humanistic perspective and found that there was significantly greater achievement for cooperative groups in which the group rewards were based on the sum of group members' individual learning. In the study, the students' conferencing grade was based on the sum of each group member's final essay grade. The system, along with the sense of camaraderie which developed between the group members, encouraged students to willingly participate in group writing conferences. The students' views about their writing groups (documented during the student interviews) were similar to Ladson-Billings' (1994) description of students in classrooms in which students viewed each other as extended family. In such classrooms, students are responsible for monitoring one another's academic work and personal behavior and for solving group problems.

- Students need to be taught how to communicate effectively.

According to Wells and Wells (1992), when students collaborate to solve a problem they must achieve intersubjectivity; or in other words, they must make their ideas and proposals known and understood by others. To accomplish this, students must make themselves more explicit and, in doing so, come to more clearly understand their proposed ideas because ideas are often challenged and must be justified. During the pilot study, the students learned to talk in an exploratory manner during the talk lessons. Mercer (1995) defines exploratory talk as talk in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas. Students learned that they must justify their ideas and opinions with reasons. For example, during one particular talk lesson, the students were pairing dogs with families. The students learned to use facts and give reasons for their choices.

A finding that was apparent from the data analyses but not readily apparent to the students was the importance of giving explicit suggestions. This was not an issue addressed in the study's pilot lessons but would be an issue that teachers need to address. During writing conferences when students gave explicit suggestions, such as add a con or replace a vague word, the suggestions were usually acted upon. However, when a suggestion was general such as improve your vocabulary or add a more interesting ending, the likelihood that the suggestion was acted upon was negligible. Therefore, it is important to teach students to give very detailed, explicit suggestions when problem solving and to justify their opinions and ideas with reasons.

- Teachers need to provide opportunities for student empowerment during the writing process.

In the study the writing groups were structured to enhance free-flowing conversations in an environment in which all students contributed and felt empowered to make decisions. Student roles were not assigned but allowed to develop naturally. Students were instructed to listen to a group member's essay and then respond but were not required to fill out forms or cover specific content until the final rubric conference. This arrangement allowed the students to set their own learning agenda. As such, first draft conferences covered a range of topics such as new ideas, vocabulary study, grammar and punctuation rules, sequencing, and formatting. This system empowered the students. According to Alice, "In our writing group we can talk and like work it out and find ways to make our writing better."

- Teachers need to be aware of two facts. One, groups evolve and acquire very distinctive discourse patterns, and two; there is not just one productive discourse pattern.

One of the findings in a study conducted by Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2000) was that "subgroups are infinitely complex, dynamic, and difficult to predict from knowledge of the context alone" (p. 186). This study's findings added support to the Smagorinsky-O'Donnell-Allen finding because each of the six writing groups developed its own discourse patterns over a period of time. For example, five of the six groups' discourse patterns could be characterized as positive. The talk was filled with affirmations, suggestions critiqued the work and not the people, and there was virtually no off-task talk. The sixth-group's talk, on the other hand, was often peppered with brusque remarks such as, "that's the worse thing I have ever seen" and off-task talk, although most of the off-task talk took place at the beginning and end of each conference. But unlike one group in the Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen study whose social process interactions were labeled destructive due to discourteous statements, resistance to discourteous statements, and apathy, and whose group product was judged substandard, the process and interaction patterns for all six writing groups (even the group with off-task talk and brusque remarks) in this study resulted in equitable contributions from all group members and the talk positively influenced all student essays.

Implications for Teacher Researchers

Three implications were drawn from the study for teacher researchers:

- Teacher research opens the door to professional opportunities

- Teacher research changes the student/teacher relationship
- Through teacher research, teachers learn or view different sides of students

Dewey (1904) emphasized the importance of teachers reflecting on their practices and integrating their observations into their emerging theories of teaching and learning. He urged educators to be both consumers and producers of knowledge about teaching. Teacher research affords teachers the opportunity to carry out Dewey's ideas. Beginning around the 1970s, organizations such as the National Writing Project began to emerge. These organizations encourage teachers to come together to read research critically, to provide an audience for each other's writing, and to develop teacher demonstrations/presentations. The presentations and journal articles that have been generated as a result of this collaboration have provided valuable information for other teachers and the field of education (Goswami & Sullivan, 1987). Personally, the genesis for this study was nurtured through my participation at the Heart of Texas Writing Project and subsequently the research has been presented at the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, at teacher staff development meetings, and was the subject of an article published in the *Indiana Reading Journal*. As a result of these professional opportunities, I have met and established relationships with professional educators and researchers in various school districts. Additionally, I had the opportunity to advocate for teaching students how to work collaboratively and communicate effectively, and most importantly, I discovered the importance of being a reflective practitioner.

According to MacLean and Mohr (1999), teacher research adds another dimension to the student/teacher relationship. The teacher and students are dependent on each other; the students are depending on the teacher for instruction, and the teacher is

depending on the students for information. Both teacher and students come to view themselves as contributors of knowledge, and this view creates a heightened sense of respect for each other. In this study the students felt very responsible for producing knowledge for the study. On two separate occasions there were technical difficulties with the tape-recordings and the students, without any adult prompting, decided to forego their recess time to re-tape their conferences. They also took it seriously when asked to fill out surveys or to participate in interviews. They especially liked giving advice to teachers on how to create successful writing groups, have students participate in talk lessons prior to beginning writing response groups, pair both girls and boys, make sure that the group members have diverse talents, and keep the same groups for the duration of the school year.

During the study I observed the students daily, reflected on recorded field notes, and transcribed the recorded peer conferences. As a result of these activities, a picture of each student emerged that was rich with understandings. For example, observing Jeff on a daily basis one would come away with a picture of a disorganized, boisterous young man who enjoyed the respect of his friends. (He was elected Student Council representative for his class). But listening to the taped conferences, a new picture emerged. Jeff was a very compassionate person who judged people and animals not by outward appearances but by their knowledge. During the talk lesson in which the students were pairing dogs with families, the group members wanted to put down the oldest dog, but Jeff passionately explained that Casey, the oldest dog "knows what it is doing, and it won't try to attack all the kids." He explained that an old dog is wiser. His other group members could not see the value of age. Although Jeff's reasons were not

outstanding, his passion won the debate. Another example concerns Jill. In the study, Jill was known as the task master. She had a high sense of dedication to the task and displayed her leadership skills by keeping everyone on task. To her credit, another group even "wished" that they had someone like Jill in their group. Because of her prominent role in her writing group, when given the chance to nominate for the "Student of the Month" award, I nominated Jill. All classroom nominee names are then submitted to the elective teachers (art teachers, physical educations teachers, music teachers…) for approval. When the list returned to the grade level, Jill's name was crossed out with the comment, "Jill is an average student with no exceptional abilities or leadership skills." The elective teachers were not teacher researchers and did not have the opportunity to "see" Jill's rich, dynamic personality and her exceptional abilities.

Having described the benefits of teacher research, I now want to make a few recommendations to educators contemplating teacher research. First, join a professional organization that promotes research or organize a group of educators at your school. Contact with other educators promotes professional growth. Sharing knowledge opens the door to new perspectives and ideas. Second, join a national organization such at the National Council of Teachers of English and subscribe to several professional journals. Reading about what other teachers were doing encouraged me to try new methods and gave me the courage to attempt a study. Third and most importantly, keep a daily reflective journal. Schon (1983) found that the contributions he found most helpful in his endeavor to offer an approach to epistemology of practice based on a close examination of what practitioners (architects, engineers…) actually do were people for whom research functions not as a distraction from practice but as a development of it. Reflecting on the

daily events and classroom activities will illuminate areas in need of further research. According to Moore (1970), "There are sufficient uniformities in problems and in devices for solving them to qualify the solvers as professionals…professionals apply very general principles and standardized knowledge to concrete problems…" (p. 56). In the classroom, there is a plethora of concrete problems.

Limitations of the Study

There were three main limitations that will be discussed: participants, longevity of the study, and limited number of essays. The participants were 24 fifth-graders. Although the number was small, the number was adequate because there were six writing groups and the participants represented a range of academic abilities, but the limitation was that the students only represented a "suburban" population and only one grade level. Racially there was limited diversity, twenty-two of the twenty-four students were White, not of Hispanic origin, one student was half Hispanic and half White, and one student was Asian.

The second limitation was the longevity of the study. The pilot study lasted for one semester, and the study was one semester in length. Therefore, the students were followed for one academic year, but the study did not look at the influence of the talk lessons or peer conferencing experience over several academic years. Will the talk lessons and peer conferencing experience continue to influence the students' collaborative behaviors and writing after the students change writing groups? If the next educational setting does not use peer conferencing, will there be a difference in the students who were exposed to writing groups and those students who never participated

in writing groups? These are just a few of the questions that could be answered with a multi-year study.

Finally, a limitation of the study was that all data were collected on two essays, one informative essay and one narrative essay. Kate identified a small part of the problem when she said during the narrative conference, "There were a lot of things on the rubric that we [students] had never done before." How would the conferences have changed if the students had more experience with conferencing about a particular genre? The students had not been exposed to the idea of sequencing until the narrative draft. Would they use that information and apply it to an informative essay? These are questions that could be answered if the study had been designed so that each group would conference on at least two essays of each genre.

A Conversation with Educational Researchers

The findings from this study support, extend, complement, and sometimes contradict previous findings on teacher research, the writing process model, classroom talk, and collaborative learning. The findings also tell the story about how one teacher researcher, me, discovered the value of my life as I experienced the agency one acquires when one writes and talks about what matters, about one's own life experiences. My story parallels the story of the students. The students discovered the importance of their experiences and knowledge as they sought to write about issues that mattered to them and to explain their ideas and suggestions to their group members. As they explained their thinking, their own values, rights and obligations were brought into focus. For example, Lee raised the issue of women's rights. She was advocating for women to have the

opportunity to play football. During the discussion, her framework for viewing issues expanded as the idea of boys being cheerleaders was discussed. The idea of viewing an issue from multiple perspectives was introduced. Thus, one finding of this study is that talk leads to learning. This finding supported Norman and Rumelhart's (1975) contention, the more a learner controls his own language strategies, and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypotheses and evaluating them. It also lends support to Ray's (1999) belief that students gain valuable feedback from peer conference conversations, Emig's (1977) contentions that both talk and writing lead to learning, and in both writing and learning, reinforcement and feedback are important. Jack explained the importance of reinforcement and feedback when he stated, "My writing is improving greatly thanks to my writing group. I use questions at the end of my articles to keep the reader thinking. I've learned many [writing] techniques such as hyperboles. I guess some of the techniques came from mini-lessons, but my group helped me understand it better." In the study students taught each other vocabulary words, reinforced technical terms such as personification and similes by providing examples, and introduced new perspectives to each other. For instance, Jeff, Russ, Peter, and Michael had an extended debate on which vehicle was safer, a motorcycle or a car. During the discussion, various crash scenarios were thrashed out, the idea of leather clothing as protective gear was suggested, and the benefits of air bags were reviewed. Thus, the curriculum was naturally expanded and the students expanded their own repertoire of topics.

In the pilot study the students practiced using exploratory talk in a manner consistent with Mercer's (1995) description of it in problem solving situations. The dissertation

study extended the use of exploratory talk to writing. In the first-draft conferences, student suggestions would be challenged and counter-challenged and consequently students saw the need to explain the rationale behind their suggestions. In the rubric conferences, where students were evaluating essays against a pre-determined criteria (see Appendix C for a sample rubric), evaluations were also challenged and counter-challenged. Thus, students were forced to justify their opinions with examples and reasons. According to Spear (1988),

> Group learning transcends the cliché of making students responsible for their own learning. In the group situation, "responsibility" means that learning becomes operational not simply receptive, purposive not simply reactive. Group learning can provide the foundation that John Dewey insisted was essential to all learning: "the formation of purposes which direct [the student's] activities in the learning process. (p.6)

In the study as the students came to understand the power of their own ideas, they developed a sense of empowerment, or agency. They learned to not just accept without question the ideas of their peers and teacher but to express their own opinions and to make their own educational decisions. When asked why one did not act upon a peer or teacher writing suggestion, the response given most often was personal choice. Kris explained, "I didn't use the suggestion, change the second to last sentence, because I wanted to keep the word guarantee in my paper." The peer-response groups provided a context in which students developed a sense of empowerment. This finding extended Lave and Wenger's (1991) explanation of Vygotsky's view that it is necessary to look not only at individuals but also at the social and material environment with which they

interacted in the course of their development. From this perspective, who a person becomes is dependent on the communication systems he participates in and on the support and assistance he receives from other members of the community in appropriating the specific values, knowledge and skills that are enacted in participation.

The findings underscore the importance of teacher research. Teacher research is important because it encourages reflection and reflection can lead to "re-seeing" one's classroom, perhaps for the first time, as a pot of gold, a pot of students with stories to tell and knowledge to share. When students share their knowledge and come to understand that their knowledge is important to the teacher, the relationship changes between the teacher and students. In this study, students were asked for their ideas on how to form groups for the following academic year. The students gave well-supported, logical suggestions, and as they shared their ideas they came to realize that I needed them as much as they needed me. This finding supports Fleischer's (1995) assertion that when both teachers and students come to view themselves as contributors of knowledge, this view creates a heightened sense of respect for each other. It also lends support to Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1993) stance that because teacher research interrupts traditional assumptions about knowers, knowing, and what can be known about teaching, it has the potential to redefine the notion of knowledge base for teaching.

The findings of this study called into question Applebee's (1987) allegation that "real researchers" are objective observers, personally removed, and bring a rigor to their work that teacher researchers lack. He views teachers as imperfect researchers because they are part of the context and interact with their informants. In this study, I was part of the context (conducted mini-lessons and structured the activities), but I did not have a

role in each of the six writing groups. (During the time the students met with their writing groups, I held individual teacher/student conferences.) Data collection was consistent (all writing conferences and student interviews were taped and transcribed) and the design of the study was based on research and sound methodology. Therefore, this study is an example of research that combines the benefits of objectivity with the benefits of the "emic" view.

Finally, this study exemplifies how teacher research can lead teachers to personal and professional development. The study began as an inquiry into the relationship between talk in peer-response groups and writing and ended with both the students and myself discovering the importance of talk and writing to the development of one's sense of self. This finding complements Goswami and Stillman's (1987) assertion that teacher research provides valuable information for teachers and the field of education.

Recommendations for Further Research

My research into the influence of classroom talk on writing was born of the desire to provide equitable and beneficial opportunities for student voices to be heard as they worked collaboratively to influence the writing of each group member. During the duration of the study, the complexity of social relationships that effect collaborative work and the necessity of certain requirements for explicitness during discussions became evident. The study also illuminated the need to teach students how to collaborate, how to talk in an exploratory manner, how to provide explicit suggestions, and how to make authorial decisions. Consequently, further research may be well directed to questions such as:

- What is it in peer writing conferences that would help students develop writing competence? (The concept of evaluation was not addressed in the current study.)
- How can peer writing groups be structured to most fully tap into the group members' areas of expertise?
- Under what conditions do students most readily learn to talk in an exploratory, explicit manner?
- How do age, gender, writing proficiency, and educational setting influence the effectiveness of peer writing groups?
- How does participation in a peer writing group influence one's view of himself as a writer, a member of the social structure, and as a person?

According to Nystrand (1997), "The most important insight from recent research on composition is that effective writing instruction is less a matter of teaching knowledge about composition, rhetoric, or grammar, and more a matter of promoting and refining the process of writing by helping students know how to proceed" (p. 97). In an ethnographic study of nine elementary school Latino children, Gutierrez (1993, as cited in Nystrand,1997) found that writing developed best to the extent that the students had opportunities to "elaborate on their own and others' responses, to ask critical questions, and to assume the multiple roles of reader, writer, and critic" (p. 101). Therefore, future research should focus on processes that incorporate classroom talk, collaborative learning, and questioning strategies.

Conclusion

According to Wells (2000), Vygotsky was concerned with "the scope and rapidity of human development: How do humans, in their short life trajectories, advance so far beyond their initial biological endowment and in such diverse directions?" (p. 53). To answer this question, Vygotsky saw it necessary to look not only at individuals but also at the social and material environment with which they interacted in the course of their development.

In this study the students became dependent on their writing group for support and assistance in their attempt to appropriate the knowledge and skills necessary to produce a quality piece of writing. Therefore, this study suggests that the use of peer writing response groups is a valuable tool for influencing writing. Students in the six writing groups developed working relationships with their group members that encouraged collaboration and free expression of their ideas and opinions. In their writing group conferences, students practiced being explicit, making connections, and justifying their own opinions or ideas. These features are precisely the sort of attributes that are held to be characteristic of effective written discourse. Thus, talk can lead a student to better writing. And according to Emig (1977), both talk and writing are processes that lead to learning. Students came to depend on their group members for help and attributed their good grades and learning to the suggestions and assistance they received in the conferences.

This study also illuminated the importance of teacher research. During the study, the students and I developed a deep respect for each other and for the knowledge we

brought to the classroom. We began our journey playing the roles of teacher and student and ended the journey as partners in education.

Appendices

Appendix A: Talk Lessons

Dawes, L. Mercer, N. & Wegerif, R. (2000). *Thinking Together: A Programme of Activities for Developing Thinking Skills at KS2*. Birmingham: The Questions Publishing Company LTD.

Section A: Focus on Talk

Lesson 1: Talk about talk
Lesson 2: Talking in groups
Lesson 3: Deciding on ground rules
Lesson 4: Using the ground rules
Lesson 5: Reasoning with ground rules

Section B: Talking, Thinking, and Learning

Lesson 6: Persuasion
Lesson 7: Kate's Choice
Lesson 8: Who Pays?

Description of Lessons

Lesson 1: Talk about talk
Aim: To raise student awareness of how they talk.
Activity: 1. Discussion about talk. Sample questions:
Are you good at talking?
Do you know anyone who is easy to talk to—can you say why?
How do babies learn to talk?
Are you asked to talk together in class? When?
2. Students sort talk words such as brag, chat, request… into categories such as talk loudly, angrily, quietly, question and answer, talk.

Lesson 2: Talking in groups
Aim: Students practice taking turns in talk.
Activities: Students play Battleship
Students conduct interviews

Lesson 3: Deciding on ground rules
Aim: To decide on a shared set of ground rules.
Activity: Students work together to devise set of ground rules.

Lesson 4: Using the ground rules
Aims: Practice using ground rules in a structured context and

develop understanding of personal morality

Activity: Students read a story and make moral decisions.
Example: Is stealing money worse than stealing a ruler?

Lesson 5: Reasoning with ground rules
Aim: To apply all ground rules for talk to reasoning problems.
Activity: Students pair dogs with families.

Lesson 6: Persuasion
Aim: Students learn to use language to persuade others
Activities: Role play scene in which one student is the parent and the other group members are children. Students request various things such as to stay up late to watch TV; to have a friend spend the night; to be allowed to have a pet…
Students write a persuasive letter

Lesson 7: Kate's choice
Aim: To apply ground rules to reasoning about social and moral issues.
Activity: Students read a story and answer the questions:
"Is it ever right to break a promise?"
"Is it ever right to steal from a store?"

Lesson 8: Who Pays?
Aim: To apply ground rules to reaching joint decisions about social and moral dilemmas.
Activity: Students read a story and answer questions such as:
"Is shoplifting the same as stealing?"
"How should shoplifters be punished?"

***There were eight additional lessons, but the students in the study did not complete them due to time constraints.

Appendix B: Mini-Lessons

August: Setting the Stage

- Writer's Notebook—Definition and What You Put in a Writer's Notebook—Fletcher—*Breathe In, Breathe Out*
- What the Workshop Is—Ray—*Wondrous Words*
- Reasons to Write (audience, genres, story, learn, reflect…)
- Importance of talk—Read My Summer Vacation—Teague and students talked about their summer vacation
- Brainstorming—
- Finding a Focus –Fletcher—Fiction Mini-Lessons
- Friendly Letter Format

September: Getting Started

- Talk Lesson One: Talk About Talk
- Specific Vocabulary—"100 Words for Said"
- Possessive Nouns
- Editing for Spelling Mistakes
- Compound Sentences
- Humorous Poems Genre Study—Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky
- Sound Devices—rhyme, alliterations, onomatopoeia, hyperbole
- Talk Lesson Two---Talking in Groups: Battleship
- Introduce idea: Reading Like a Writer—Cynthia Rylant—*When the Relatives Came*
- Introduce the sounds of language—choral reading
- Talk Lesson Two—Talking in Groups: Interviews
- Personification
- Idioms
- Pronoun Referents
- Talk Lesson Three: Deciding on Ground Rules

October

- Genre Immersion—Research
- Exploring and Activating Prior Knowledge—Fletcher 81
- Brainstorming for topics
- Talk Lesson Four: Using the Ground Rules: Stealing
- Coming Up With Good Questions—Fletcher 83
- Talk Lesson Five: Reasoning with Ground Rules: Dogs
- Publishing
- Taking Notes—KWL chart
- Bibliographies

- Using Questions to Outline—Fletcher 51
- Creating a Glossary—Fletcher 76
- Describing Your Subject—Fletcher 61

November

- Using Supporting Detail and Examples-Fletcher 62
- Leaving Out What the Reader Already Knows—Fletcher 63
- Writing an Introduction—Fletcher 57
- End With a Bang –Fletcher 106
- Talk Lesson Six—Persuasive Skits
- Writing a Topic Sentence –Fletcher 59
- Rubric Creation
- Talk Lesson Six—Persuasive Letter
- Possessive Pronouns
- Homophones
- Using there, their, they're
- Talk Lesson Seven—Kate's Choice
- Rubric Grading

December

- Genre Immersion—Children's Books
- Project Description
- Using a Chart to Summarize Information—Fletcher—94
- Putting Tension in a Title—Fletcher 85
- Using Repetition for Emphasis –Fletcher 67
- Including Detailed Drawings—Fletcher 73
- Semicolons
- Illustrations
- Talk Lesson Eight—Who Pays?

January

- Genre Immersion—Informative Essay (*Time for Kids* magazines)
- Exploring—Activating Prior Knowledge—Fletcher 81
- Listing the Pros and Cons of an Argument—Fletcher 102
- Talking Before you Write—Fletcher 22
- Airing the Opposing Point of View—Fletcher 103
- Taking Notes—Fletcher—23
- Punctuating Dialogue/Quotations

February

- Figurative Language Review (simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, personification)
- Revision—Including peer suggestions
- Prepositions
- Prepositional Phrases
- Expanding Sentences with Prepositional Phrases
- How to use PowerPoint
- Writing a Caption for a Photograph or Drawing
- Writing Techniques to create suspense—*House of Dies Drear*

March

- Leads—Fletcher 83
- Using Surprising Imagery—Fletcher 84
- Varying Sentence Length—Fletcher 85
- Cracking Open General Words—Fletcher 50
- Comma Usage
- Sequencing: Cause-Effect Chain
- Rubric Creation
- Titles—How to Create and Punctuate
- Editing for Mechanical Errors

April: TAKS

May: Time for Fun

- Mother's Day Poetry
- Mother's Day Letters
- Father's Day Thank-You Notes
- Father's Day Acrostic Poems
- Portfolio Review

Academic Sources:

Fletcher, R. (1996). *Breathing In, Breathing Out: Keeping a Writer's Notebook.* Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (1998). *Craft Lesson: Teaching Writing K-8*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K-8.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Ray, K.W. (1999). *Wondrous Words*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Appendix C: Rubrics

Informative Essay

Category	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	In Progress
Information **X 30**	Information covers several aspects of the topic. Main ideas are supported with details. Obvious information is deleted.	Information covers several aspects of the topic. Obvious information is deleted.	Information covers several aspects of the topic.	Information is scarce.
Readability **X 30**	Clear topic sentences with all information related to topic. Technical vocabulary is defined. Smooth transitions between paragraphs.	Clear topic sentences with all information related to topic. Smooth transitions between paragraphs.	Clear topic sentences. Some transitions between paragraphs.	Essay structure is hard for the reader to follow.
Lead **X 10**	Catches reader's attention. Transitions well into topic. Topic is described. Context is provided.	Catches reader's attention. Topic is described. Context is provided.	Catches reader's attention.	No lead.
Closing **X 10**	Strong ending that evokes further questions and thought.	Strong ending that leaves reader with ideas to think about.	Ending is present.	No ending.
Mechanics **X 20**	0-2 mistakes Spelling End Punctuation Pronoun Usage Complete sentences	3-5 mistakes	6-8 mistakes	9+ mistakes

Suspenseful Narrative Essay

Category	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	In Progress
Lead **X 10**	Lead captures reader's attention. Lead is well developed with details and descriptive words. Lead is creative.	Lead captures reader's attention. Lead is well developed with details and descriptive words.	Lead captures reader's attention.	Lead can not be distinguished from plot.
Surprising Imagery **X 30**	Characters **and** setting are described using unique and developed comparisons.	Characters **or** setting is described using unique and developed comparisons.	Setting **or** characters are developed using comparisons.	Comparisons are not present.
Sentence Length **X 10**	Sentence variety is used for emphasis and pacing. Story is enhanced.	Sentence variety is used for emphasis or pacing.	Sentence variety is evident but does not enhance story.	All sentences are the same length.
Precise Vocabulary **X 10**	Narrative is filled with descriptive words, precise vocabulary, and figurative language. (onomatopoeia, alliteration, personification…)	Narrative has precise vocabulary and descriptive words.	Narrative has descriptive words.	Vocabulary does not enhance story.
Sequencing **X 30**	Plot line is logical and easy to follow. There are no gaps. Foreshadowing is used.	Plot line is logical and easy to follow. The reader has no more than two questions.	Plot line has gaps. Reader has trouble following the sequence of events.	Reader does not understand the plot line.
Mechanics **X 10**	0-3 mistakes	4-6 mistakes	7-9 mistakes	10+ mistakes

Appendix D: Writing Survey

Writing Survey

Directions:

- Make a list of suggestions that were made and discussed during either your student/teacher writing conference or your peer group writing conference.
- From the list of suggestions you made, select one suggestion that you used in your final essay.
- Write your suggestion down on your own paper and explain why you incorporated that suggestion into your final draft.
- Now select a suggestion from your list of suggestions that you DID NOT incorporate into your final draft. In other words, pick a suggestion that you did not use.
- Again, write your suggestion down on your own paper and explain why you DID NOT incorporate the suggestion.
- Take your time. Reflect on your answers. Remember to explain your reasons.

"One of the most important aspects of writing is for student to gain independence as learners, knowing and trusting their own choices."

Linda Rief, Teacher Researcher

Bibliography

Ackerman, J.M. (1993). The promise of writing to learn. *Written Communication, 10,* 334-370.

Applebee, A. (1986). Problems in process approaches: Toward a reconceptualization of process instruction. In D. Bartholomae & A. Petrosky (Eds.). *The Teaching of writing* (pp. 95-113). Chicago, IL: National Society for the Study of Education.

Applebee, A. (1987). Musings: Teachers and the process of research. *Research in the Teaching of English, 21,* 5-7.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays.* (V.W. McGee, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic imagination.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barnes, D. (1976). *From communication to curriculum*. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc.

Barnes, D. & Todd, F. (1977). *Communication and learning in small groups.* Boston: Routledge & K. Paul.

Bartlett, E.J. (1981). *Learning to write: some cognitive and linguistic components.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Baumann, J.F. & Duffy-Hester, A.M. (2000). Making sense of classroom worlds: Methodology in teacher research. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R.

Barr (Eds.) *Handbook of reading research. Vol. 3* (pp. 77-98). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Beade, P. (1987). Comment. *College English, 49,* 708.

Becker, A.L. (1992). Silence across languages: An essay. In C. Kramsch & S. McConnell-Ginet (Eds.), *Text and context: Cross-disciplinary perspectives* (pp. 115-123). Lexington, MA: Heath.

Berkenkotter, C. (1981). Understanding a writer's awareness of audience. *College Composition and Communication, 32,* 388-399.

Bomer, R. (1995). *Time for meaning: Crafting literate lives in middle and high school.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Boss, S. (2002). Permanent ink: Learning to write. *Northwest Education, 8,* 2-9.

Bouton, C. & Rice, B. (1983). Developing student skills and abilities. In C Bouton & R.Y. Garth (Eds.) *Learning in groups* (pp.31-40). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983.

Bracewell, R., Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (1978). The development of audience awareness in writing. *Resources in Education*, pp. 154-433.

Bruffee, K.A. (1983). Teaching writing through collaboration. In C. Bouton & R.Y. Garth (Eds.), *Learning in groups* (p. 23-30). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983.

Bruffee, K.A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the "Conversation of Mankind." *College English, 46,* 635-652.

Bruffee, K.A. (1985). *A Short course in writing: Practical rhetoric for teaching composition through collaborative learning (3rd Ed.).* Boston: Little Brown and Co.

Bruffee, K.A. (1999). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Calkins, L.M. (1985). Forming research communities among naturalistic researchers. In B. McClelland & T. Donovan (Eds.). *Perspectives on research and scholarship in composition (pp. 125-144).* New York: Modern Language Association.

Calkins, L. M. (1991). *Living between the lines*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L.M. (1979). Learning to throw away. *Language Arts, 56,* 747-452.

Campbell, D.T. & Stanley, J.C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Carroll, J.A. & Wilson, E.E. (1993). *Acts of teaching: How to teach writing: A text, a reader, a narrative.* Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press.

Cazden, C.B. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Chafe, W. (1980). The deployment of consciousness in the production of a narrative. In W. Chafe (Ed.), *The Pear stories: Cognitive cultural and linguistic aspects of a narrative production*. (pp. 9-50). Norwood, NY: Ablex.

Cochran-Smith, M. (1984). *The making of a reader*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside outside: Teacher research and knowledge.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Cooney, C. (1990). *The face on the milk carton.* NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books.

Cope, B. & Kalantziz, M (1993). *The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Dahl, K.L. (1988). Writers teaching writers: What children learn in peer conferences. *English Quarterly*, 21, 164-173.

Dawes, L., Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. (2000). *Thinking together: A Programme of activities for developing thinking skills at KS2*. Birmingham: The Questions Publishing Company LTD.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280-298.

Derrida, J. (1980). The law of genre. *Critical Inquiry, 7*, 55-81.

Dewey, J. (1904). *The relation of theory to practice in education: The Third NSSE yearbook* (pt. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. (1963). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books.

Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1916).

Dewey, J. (1990). *The School and society; and, The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Originally published in 1956).

Donovan, C.A. & Smolkin, L.B. (2002). Children's genre knowledge: An examination of K-5 students' performance on multiple tasks providing differing levels of scaffolding. *Reading Research Quarterly, 37*, 428-465.

Dyson, A.H. (1985). Individual differences in emergent writing. In M. Farr (Ed.), *Advances in writing research, Vol. 1: Children's writing development* (pp. 59-126). Norwood, MH: Ablex.

Dyson, A.H. (1989). *Multiple worlds of child writers: Friends learning to write*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Dyson, A.H. (1993). *Social worlds of children learning to write in an urban primary school.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Dyson, A.H. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Edwards, A.D. & Westgate, D.P.G. (1994). *Investigating classroom talk.* Washington, D.C.: Routledge Falmer.

Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power: Techniques for mastering the writing process*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Emig, J. (1977). Writing as a mode of learning. *College Composition and Communication, 28,* 122-128.

Fecho, R. (1989). *On becoming mean and sensitive: Teacher to student writing conferences in the secondary classroom*. Report prepared for the National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation.

Feiman-Nemser, S., & Featherstone, J. (1992). *Adventures in teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fine, G.A. (1987). *With the Boys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fleischer, C. (1995). *Composing teacher-research: A prosaic history*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Flower, L.S. & Hayes, J.R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication, 32*, 365-387.

Foley, D.E. (1990). *Learning capitalist culture: Deep in the heart of Tejas.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Foley, D.E. (1995). *The heartland chronicles*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gaventa, J. & Horton, B.D. (1981). A citizens' research project in Appalachia, USA. *Convergence, 14*, 30-42.

Gere, A. & Stevens, R. (1985). The language of writing groups: How oral response shapes revision. In S. Freedman (Ed.), *The Acquisition of written language: Response and revision* (pp. 85-105). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.

Gere A.R. & Abbot, R.D. (1985). Talking about writing: The language of writing groups. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 19, 362-385.

Gorman, A.H. (1974). *Teachers and learners: The interactive process of education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Gorrell, R. M. (1983). How to make mulligan stew: Process and product again. *College Composition and Communication, 34*, 272-277.

Goswami, D. & Stillman, P. (1987). *Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Graves, D.H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D.H. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Greenberg, K.L. (1987). Defining, teaching, and testing basic writing competence. *Topics in Language Disorders, 7*, 31-41.

Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Guerra, J.C. (1998). *Close to home: Oral and literate practices in a transnational mexicano community*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gutierrez, K. (1993). Scripts, counterscripts, and multiple scripts. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta.

Gutierrez, K. (1995). Unpacking academic discourse. *Discourse processes*, 19, 21-37.

Gutierrez, K., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: Jack Brown versus Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*, 445-471.

Hamilton, V. (1984). *House of Dies Drear.* NY: Simon Schuster Children's Publishing Co.

Handloff. E. & Golden, J.M. (1995). Writing as a way of "Getting To" what you think and feel about a story. In N.L. Roser & M.G. Martinez (Eds.). *Book talk and beyond: Children and teachers respond to literature.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Haneda, M., & Wells, G. (2000). Writing in knowledge-building communities. *Research in the Teaching of English, 34*, 430-460.

Hanks, W.F. (1987). Discourse genres in a theory of practice. *American Ethnologist, 14*, 668-692.

Hayes, J.R., & Flower, L.S. (1986). Writing research and the writer. *American Psychologist, 41,* 1106-1113.

Hillocks, G, Jr. (1986). *Research on written composition*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hubbard, R.S. & Power, B.M. (1993). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher researchers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Huberman, M. (1996). Moving mainstream: Taking a closer look at teacher research. *Language Arts*, 73 124-140.

Hymes, D. (1973). On the origins and foundations of inequality among speakers. *Daedalus*, 102, 69.

Jaworski, A., & Coupland, N. (1999). Perspectives on discourse analysis. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *Discourse reader* (pp. 1-44). . New York: Routledge.

Johnson, T.S. (1986). Comment. *College English, 48,* 76.

Juster, N. (1961). *The phantom tollbooth*. New York: Dell Yearling.

Kamberelis, G. (1999). Genre development and learning: Children writing stories, science reports, and poems. *Research in the Teaching of English, 33,* 403-460.

Kaufer, D., Hayes, J.R., & Flower, L.S. (1986). Composing written sentences. *Research in the Teaching of English, 20,* 121-140.

Kaufman, D. (1963). *Conferences and conversations: Listening to the literate classroom.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kidder, L.H. (Ed.). (1981). Selltiz*, Wrightsman and Cook's research methods in social relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kincheloe, J.L. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a Path to empowerment*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Klintworth, K. (2001). Audience and voice. In M.L. Warner (Ed.). *Winning ways of coaching writing: A practical guide for teaching writing* (pp. 28-41). Needham Heights, MA: A Pearson Education Co.

Ladson-Billings (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lawson, J. & Others. (1983). The Utah Plan: College freshmen in an experimental liberal studies program. *Journal of General Education*, 35, p. 136-153.

Lensmire, T. (2000). *Powerful writing: Responsible teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Lewin, K. (1948). *Resolving social conflicts*. New York: Harper & Row.

Lindfors, J.W. (1990). Speaking creatures in the classroom. In S. Hynds & D.L. Rubin (Eds.). *Perspectives on talk & learning* (pp. 21-39). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Lotman, Y. M. (1988). Text within a text. *Soviet Psychology*, 26, 32-51.

Lukacs, G. (1975). *The Theory of the novel: A Historico-Philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature.* Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.

Lytle, S.L. (2000). Teacher research in the contact zone. In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of reading research, V. 3* (pp. 691-718). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

MacLean, M.S. & Mohr, M.M. (1999). *Teacher researchers at work*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project.

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: A Personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. Wellesley, MA: Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.

Mercer, N. (1995). *The Guided construction of knowledge: Talk amongst teachers and learners*. New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Mercer, N. (2000). *Words & minds: How we use language to think together*. London: Routledge.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. S*an Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miller, C.R. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70*, 151-167.

Miller, G. (1956). The magic number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review, 63*, 81-92.

Moore, W. E. (1970). *The Professions: Roles and rules*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Murray, D. (1982). *Learning by teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Murray, D. M. (1996). *Crafting a life in essay, story, poem*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Myers, G. (1986). Reality, consensus, and reform in the rhetoric of composition teaching. *College English, 48*, 154-171.

Myers M. (1996). *Changing our minds: Negotiating English and literacy*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Newkirk, T. (1989). *More than stories: The Range of children's writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Norman, D.A., Rumelhart, D.E., the LNR research group, & Abrahamson, (et.al). (1976). *Explorations in cognition*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.

Nystrand, M. (1986). *The Structure of written communication: Studies in reciprocity between writers and readers*. Orlando: Academic Press.

Nystrand, M. & Brandt. D. (1989). Response to writing as a context for learning to write. In C. Anson (Ed.), *Writing and response: A Theory, practice, and research* (pp. 209-230). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Nystrand, M. (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Oakeshott, M. (1962). *Rationalism in politics*. New York: Basic Books.

Ochs, E. (1999). Transcription as theory. A. Jaworski, & N. Coupland (Eds.). *The Discourse readers* (pp.167-182). New York: Routledge.

O'Dell, L. (1987). Planning classroom research. In D. Goswami & P.R. Stillman (Eds.), *Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change* (pp. 128-160). Upper Montclair: NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Philips, S. U. (1972). Participant structures and communicative competence: Warm Springs children in community and classroom. In C. B. Cazden, V.P. John, & D. Hymes (Eds.). *Functions of language in the classroom* (pp. 370-394). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Piaget, J. (1971). *Genetic epistemology*. (E. Duckworth, Trans.). New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Portalupi, J. (1999). Learning to write: Honoring both process and product. *Primary Voices K-6,* 7, 2-6.

Pressley, M., Harris, K.R., & Guthrie, J.T. (Eds.) (1992). *Promoting academic competence and literacy in school.* San Diego: Academic Press.

Ray, K.W. (1999). *Wondrous words: Writers and writing in the elementary classroom.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Ray, K.W. (2001). *The Writing workshop: Working through the hard parts (And they're all hard parts*). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Rief, L. (1992). *Seeking diversity: Language Arts with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Rumelhart, D. & Norman, D.A. (1976). *Accretion, tuning and restructuring: three modes of learning* (Tech. Rep. No. 7602). La Jolla: California Univ., Center for Human Information Processing.

Sacks, H. & Schegloff, E. (1974). Two preferences in the organization of reference of persons in conversation and their interaction. In N.H. Avison & R. J. Wilson (Eds.). *Ethnomethodology: Labeling theory and deviant behavior*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Schon, D.A. (1983). *The Reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.* New York: Basic Books.

Sharan, S. & Sharan, Y. (1976). *Small group teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Educational Technology Publications.

Slavin, R.E. (1987). Cooperative learning: Where behavioral and humanistic approaches to classroom motivation meet. *Elementary School Journal*, 88, 29-37.

Smagorinsky, P. & O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2000). Idiocultural diversity in small groups: The role of the relational framework in collaborative learning. In C.D. Lee & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.). *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry* (pp. 165-190). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, F. (1982). *Writing and the writer*. New York: Holt Rinehart.

Spear, K. (1988). *Sharing writing: Peer response groups in English classes*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc.

Stenhouse, L. (1985). *Research as a basis for teaching*. London: Heinemann.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sweigart, W. (1991). Classroom talk, knowledge development, and writing. *Research in the Teaching of English, 25*, 469-496.

Thayer, E.L. & Bing, C.H. (2000). *Casey at the bat: A ballad of the republic sung in the year 1888*. New York: Handprint Books.

Trimbur, J. (1989). Consensus and difference in collaborative learning. *College English, 51*, 602-616.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and language*. E. Hanfmann & G. Vakar (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press. (Original work published in 1934).

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The Development of higher psychological processes.* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman, Eds). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (Original works published in 1830, 1833, & 1835).

Walker, C.P., & Ellias, D. (1987). Writing conference talk: Factors associated with high and low-rated writing conferences. *Research in the Teaching of English, 21*, 266-285.

Webb, N. (1985). Student interaction and learning in small groups: A research summary. In R.E. Slavin, S. Sharan, S. Kagan, R. Hertz-Lazarowitz, C. Webb, & R. Schmuck (Eds.). *Learning to cooperate, cooperating to learn* (pp. 147-172). New York: Plenum.

Weiss, R.S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The Art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: The Free Press.

Wells, G. (2000). Dialogic inquiry in education: Building on the legacy of Vygotsky. In C.D. Lee & Smagorinsky (Eds.). *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry* (pp. 51-85). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, G. & Chang-Wells, G.L. (1992). *Constructing knowledge together: Classrooms as centers of inquiry and literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wittrock, M. (1990). Generative processes of comprehension. *Educational Psychologist, 24*, 345-376.

Zecker, L.B. (1999). Different texts, different emergent writing forms. *Language Arts, 76*, 483-490.

Zeichner, K.M. & Noffke, S.E. (2001). Practitioner research. In V. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of research on teaching*. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Zumwalt, K.K. (1982). Are we improving or undermining teaching? In L.N. Tanner (Ed.), *Critical Issues in Curriculum: 87th Yearbook of National Society for the Study of Education.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

VITA

Carol Werthmann Bedard was born in El Paso, Texas on June 28, 1954, the daughter of Delia Araiza Werthmann and Henry Werthmann. After completing her work at Ysleta High School, El Paso, Texas, in 1972, she entered West Texas State University in Canyon, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Music from West Texas State University in May 1977. During the following years she was employed as a music therapist and program consultant for the Amarillo State Center for Human Development while continuing her education at West Texas State University and the University of Houston, Houston, Texas. In August 1980 the Alief Independent School District employed her as a middle school teacher. In August 1981 she received the degree of Master of Education from West Texas State University. She continued to teach in the Houston area for The Teaching and Learning Center of Texas and Fort Bend I.S.D. until she moved to the Texas Hill Country in 1995. At that time, Marble Falls I.S.D. employed her as a fourth-grade Gifted and Talented Language Arts teacher. In August 1999 she moved to Austin, Texas and began employment at Lake Elementary as a fifth-grade Language Arts teacher while enrolling in Distant Learning Courses at the University of North Texas. In January 2001 she entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin and in July 2002 she completed the requirements for the Gifted and Talented Endorsement at the University of North Texas. She has published two articles, "Open the Door to Multiple Intelligences," *Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented Tempo*, Fall 1996, 16(4): Talents for the 21st Century and "Using Talk Lessons to Enhance the Effectiveness of Collaborative Groups" in *The Indiana Reading Journal*, Fall, 2004.

Permanent Address: 24 Greenway Plaza, Suite 440, Houston, Texas 77046

This dissertation was typed by the author.